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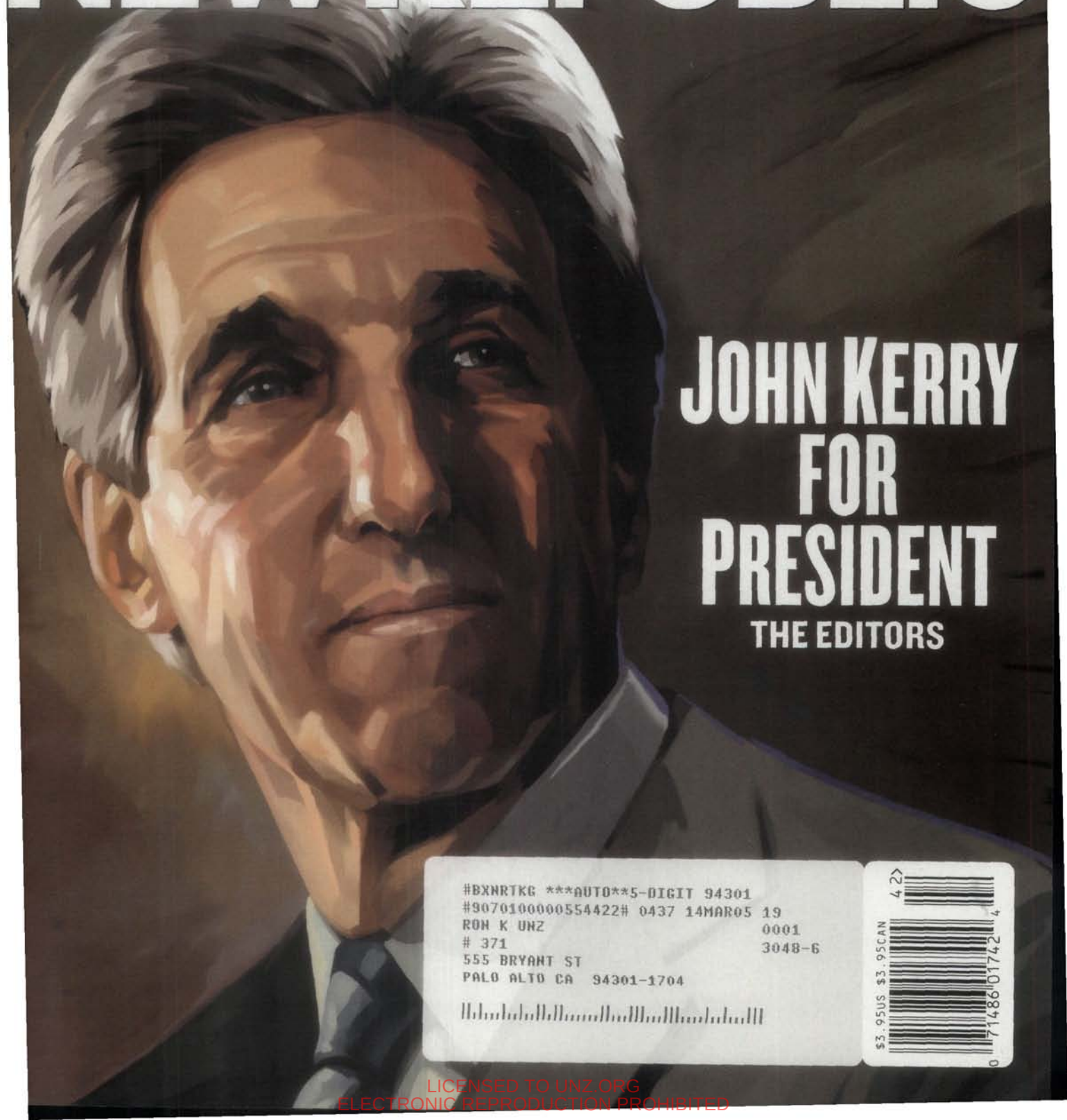

JOHN KERRY FOR PRESIDENT

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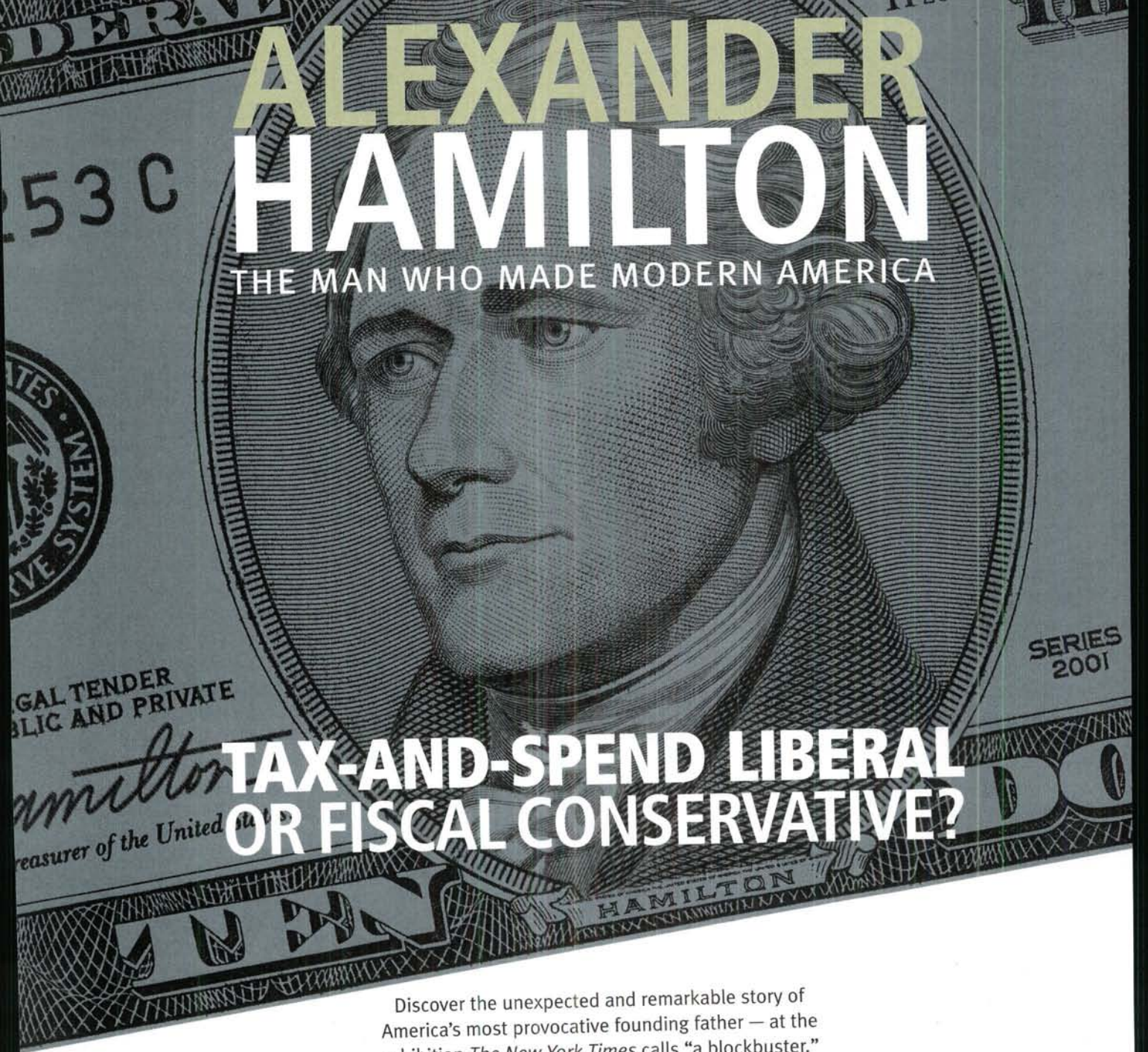

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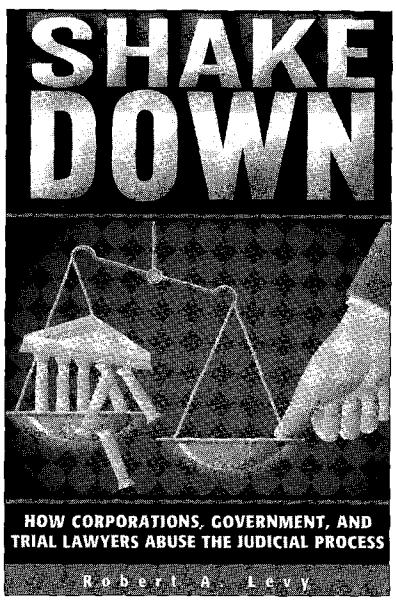
A sweeping indictment of lawsuits abuse



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SAIGON GRILL

MARTIN PERETZ'S COMMENTS ON John Kerry ("Ghosts," September 13 & 20) left a misleading impression that demands clarification. It is simply not the case that Kerry "accused other veterans, and himself, of war crimes and atrocities" when he testified before the Senate in 1971. What Kerry did was *summarize the findings* of the "Winter Soldier" investigation, which had taken place in Detroit several months earlier—"an investigation," as Kerry told Congress, "at which over one hundred fifty honorably discharged, and many very highly decorated, veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia." There was no accusation in Kerry's summary. He made it clear that these men were courageously confronting their own and their comrades' conduct—and demanding to know how *their government had created the conditions* for that conduct.

The larger point is this: The vileness of the Vietnam War cannot be measured by totaling up torched villages and severed hands. "Atrocity" is a slippery and (rightly) capacious word. The bombing campaigns, the free-fire zones, the use of Napalm and Agent Orange were all officially sponsored atrocities, conceived and sanctioned by the highest civilian and military authorities. Before the end, the war itself was an atrocity. Thousands of the men who fought in it came to that conclusion themselves, based on their own experience. *If anyone should feel* "penance and remorse," as Peretz admonishes Kerry, it is not the veterans themselves but the policymakers who put them in an impossible situation in the first place. Despite the cloud of collective amnesia that has enveloped our public memory since Ronald Reagan's ascendancy, some of us still remember who *bears the real responsibility* for that atrocious war.

JACKSON LEARS
Editor-in-Chief
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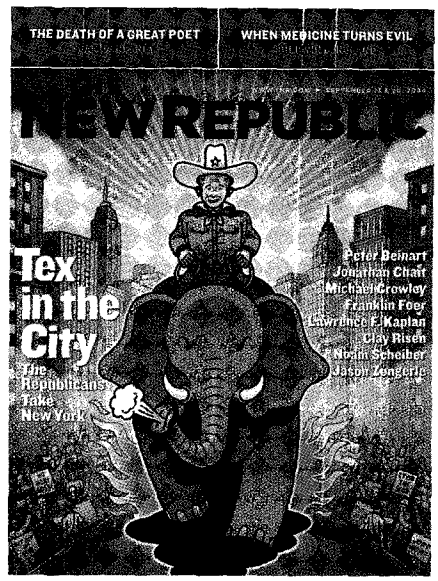

IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND what Peretz is thinking. What is he berating John Kerry for? No matter how you say it, John Kerry went to Vietnam to fight for his country. At that time, his government believed that a war had to be fought to stop the advance of communism. Unlike our current president and his vice president, he did not seek deferments or go into the Texas Air National Guard and not show up.

MALCA INSLICHT BLUM
Woodbridge, Connecticut

PERETZ THINKS JOHN KERRY OWES "penance and remorse" to his fellow soldiers. I wonder what Bush owes.

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He shirked his own military responsibilities, not even bothering to explain why records suggest he was absent for part of his cushy National Guard detail. He mocked our troops by wearing a flight suit and prancing around an aircraft carrier in front of a MISSION ACCOMPLISHED banner when the insurgency in Iraq was just gearing up. When no weapons of mass destruction or ties to Al Qaeda were found in Iraq, he began doing flip-flops on his reasoning for our invasion of the country. And he has never shown any penance or remorse for the government's failure to prevent September 11 or for its rush to war with faulty intelligence. Vietnam is clearly still a wound festering in America, but current events point to the fact that Bush is the man who is truly unfit for command.

TIKVAH WIENER
Teaneck, New Jersey

HOMELAND SECURITY

MICHAEL CROWLEY HIT THE bull's eye ("Muzzled," September 27). He rightly points out that, from the outset, the assault-weapons ban was little more than a (brief) triumph of symbolic politics for the Clinton administration. I would add, however, that the problem is not that Democrats don't know what to do about the gun debate but rather that they don't understand the underlying issues. For tried-and-true gun enthusiasts, owning a gun means being a good American. Gun ownership symbolizes staunch support for core American values like freedom, independence, even responsibility—guns protect house and home, family and community, the sanctity of the nation, past and future. Thus, gun enthusiasts view gun control not only as government intrusion into their lives and homes, but also as a slap to their patriotism. Put plainly, a politician who supports gun control presumes he can better protect your family (and country) than you can. And he'll trample the Constitution to do it. Democrats must recognize that the gun debate is less about guns and more about competing visions of American citizenship. They may not like it, but they misunderstand it at their peril.

ABIGAIL KOHN
***Author,* SHOOTERS: MYTHS AND REALITIES OF AMERICA'S GUN CULTURES**
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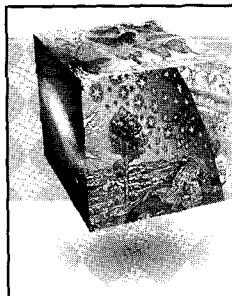

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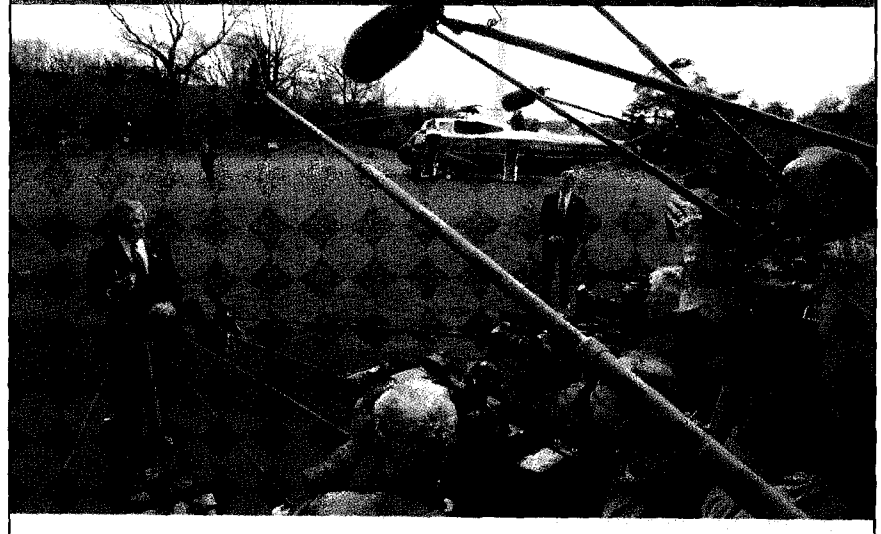

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Ad Lib

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

IN ITS FINAL DAYS, THIS MOST extraordinary of elections has turned ordinary. The candidates are talking less about Iraq, which justifiably dominated the campaign a month ago, and turning to poll-tested standbys. For John Kerry, it's populism and Social Security, the themes Al Gore closed with in 2000. For George W. Bush, it's liberalism, the bogeyman that dominated his father's campaign in 1988.

The Iraq portion of the campaign ended in a draw—which must have pleased the Kerry campaign, since it initially looked like a Bush rout. Starting at the Republican convention, the Bush campaign brilliantly framed Iraq and the war on terrorism less as questions of policy than of character—tests of principle and resolve that Kerry allegedly failed. The GOP's national security attacks made Kerry look so wishy-washy that Bush gained huge leads on terrorism and Iraq, even as the U.S. occupation continued to falter. It was only in late September, when Kerry finally articulated a clear line on the war—a line he maintained through the debates—that he began to repair the damage. Last week's *Washington Post* tracking poll found that, between September 26 and October 14, the percentage of likely voters who said Kerry "has taken a clear stand on the issues" jumped ten points.

Given this, you would think the Bush campaign would return in the closing weeks to what worked so well in September: character attacks. They did so after the third debate, using Kerry's tacky comments about Mary Cheney to suggest he lacked decency—a strategy that seems to have flipped that debate from a defeat into a victory and may have given the president a boost in the polls. But, on the stump and in his advertising, Bush is spending most of his time attacking Kerry as a liberal. Recounting an interview with Bush campaign manager Ken Mehlman, *National Review*'s Kate O'Beirne wrote last week, "He flatly states what sounds like the final weeks' message: John Kerry is a Massachusetts liberal on the economy, on foreign policy, and on cultural issues."

The mystifying thing about this change of course is that, while character attacks have worked well for the GOP in recent years—both against Al Gore in 2000 and against Kerry this year—the liberal charge has not. Poppy used the L word effectively against Michael Dukakis in 1988, and, as late as 1994, it helped slay New York Governor Mario Cuomo, whom George Pataki dubbed "too liberal for too long." But, by 1996, the magic had run out. Bob Dole hurled the charge at Bill Clinton to little avail. And, as Jonathan Cohn has noted ("Fade to Black," November 13, 2000), Pataki's consultant, Arthur Finkelstein, played the liberal card against three Democratic Senate candidates that year—Robert Torricelli in New Jersey, Paul Wellstone in Minnesota, and Jack Reed in Rhode Island. After losing all three races, Finkelstein admitted that the epithet had lost its sting.

The reason, I suspect, is race—or, more accurately, the absence of race. As Stanley Greenberg discovered in his 1985 study of Macomb County, Michigan, Reagan Democrats saw liberals as people who spent their tax dollars on welfare for minorities. Crime was another racially saturated issue, as Dukakis learned when Willie Horton became the public face of his prison furlough program in 1988. But, in 1992, Clinton famously left the campaign trail to execute Rickey Ray Rector, setting an example that would soon lead most Democrats to embrace the death penalty. That change, plus the plummeting crime rate, largely eliminated one racially tinged issue. Clinton's decision to abolish welfare eliminated another. By 1996, as Finkelstein found out, liberalism just wasn't that scary anymore.

Can Bush make it scary again? Part of his L-word attack is the claim that Kerry will raise taxes. But, in the '80s, what irked Reagan Democrats was the perception that their tax dollars were funding welfare. Today, it's a different story. When Bush says Kerry can't pay for his health care plan without raising taxes, he's implicitly conceding that Kerry will spend tax dollars on health care, something swing voters support. Last week's NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll gave Bush a mere six-point lead on taxes, far less than Kerry's edge on health care.

Another potential component of the liberalism charge is cultural elitism, which Poppy Bush exploited by slamming Dukakis's veto of a bill requiring teachers to lead students in saying the Pledge of Allegiance. Some Bush surrogates have tried to use gay marriage the same way. But, while the issue may mobilize the GOP's evangelical base, it doesn't seem to be rousing swing voters. Last week's CBS News/*New York Times* poll found that only 1 percent of voters identified same-sex marriage as the issue they cared about most.

That leaves terrorism. It is possible that September 11 gives the L word a salience it lacked in the '90s. And Bush is trying to update it to mean someone who would require a "permission slip" from other countries to defend America. But the danger of attacking Kerry as a liberal, rather than as a flip-flopper, is that it focuses the national security debate away from character and toward policy. A liberal, unlike a flip-flopper, is someone with clear views about national security. Those views may not be particularly popular—voters may indeed suspect Kerry would be too deferential to other countries. But, given voter dissatisfaction over Iraq, it is no longer clear that Bush's views are very popular, either. The flip-flop attack worked in part by appealing to a slice of the electorate that didn't like Bush's foreign policy but liked his steadfastness in carrying it out. By reframing the national security debate in ideological—rather than characterological—terms, Bush risks losing them.

It may be that the president has no choice—that, after Kerry's steady performance in the debates, the waffler charge no longer works. But, if that is the case, it is a big problem for the GOP. In the campaign's crucial final days, Bush is not going positive, the sign of a truly strong incumbent. And he has jettisoned the line of attack that worked best. The last-minute appearance of the liberal card may be a sign that the president, despite his vaunted confidence, knows he has a weak hand.

PETER BEINART

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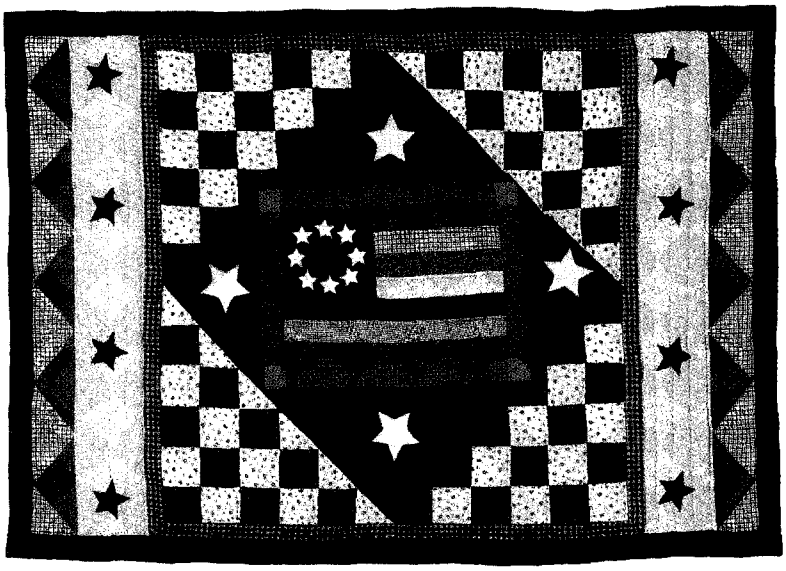

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Kerry for President

THERE WAS A time, in the aftermath of September 11, when this magazine liked what it heard from George W. Bush. He said America was at war—not merely with an organization, but with a totalitarian ideology. And he pledged to defeat Islamist totalitarianism the same way we defeated European totalitarianism, by spreading democracy. For a publication that has long believed in the marriage of liberalism and American power, this was the right analysis. And its correctness mattered more than the limitations of the man from which it came.

Three years later, it has become tragically clear that the two cannot be separated. The president's war on terrorism, which initially offered a striking contrast to his special interest–driven domestic agenda, has come to resemble it. The common thread is ideological certainty untroubled by empirical evidence, intellectual curiosity, or open debate. The ideology that guides this president's war on terrorism is more appealing than the corporate cronyism that guides his domestic policy. But it has been pursued with the same sectarian, thuggish, and ultimately self-defeating spirit. You cannot lead the world without listening to it. You cannot make the Middle East more democratic while making it more anti-American. You cannot make the United States more secure while using security as a partisan weapon. And you cannot demand accountable government abroad while undermining it at home.

And so a president who promised to make America safer by making the Muslim world more free has failed on both counts. This magazine has had its differences with John Kerry during his career and during this campaign. But he would be a far better president than George W. Bush.

ON DOMESTIC POLICY, BUSH has been Newt Gingrich without the candor. Like Gingrich, he envisions stripping away many of the welfare-state protections that shield economically vulnerable Americans from the vagaries of the free market (while insulating corporations ever more from those same forces). But, rather than explicitly opposing popular government programs, as Gingrich did, Bush has pursued a more duplicitous strategy: He is eviscerating the government's ability to pay for them. His tax cuts, while sold as short-term measures to revive the economy, actually represent long-term assaults on the progressive tax code. If allowed to fully take effect, they will substantially shift the tax burden from unearned wealth to income, dramatically increasing inequality. And they will produce what Bush's former Treasury secretary, Paul O'Neill, has privately called a "fiscal crisis"—a collapse in government revenue just as the baby-boom retirement sends Medicare and Social Security costs skyrocketing. This crisis will sap America's ability to wage the war on terrorism—since government will lack the funds to adequately safeguard homeland security or expand the military. It will create enormous pressure to eviscerate the government protections that guarantee poor and middle-class Americans even the meager economic security they enjoy today. And it will be entirely by design.

The tax cuts are typical of a president who cloaks a relentlessly ideological domestic agenda in moderate, problem-solving language—and gets away with it by distorting the facts. In 2001, Bush presented his policy on stem cells as a pragmatic compromise—in which research on preexisting stem-cell lines would be funded but research on new ones would not. But the supposed compromise was based on a falsehood. Bush vastly exaggerated the number of viable preexisting stem-cell lines, thus pretending he was facilitating the medical research most Americans support while actually crippling it in obeisance to his conservative Christian base.

On prescription drugs, the story is similar. With elderly Americans demanding that the government cover their prescription-drug costs, Bush endorsed a bill that administered such coverage not through Medicare but through the private sector in which his administration harbors a near-theological faith. Since private insurers had to be lured into the market with large subsidies, Bush's plan offered less coverage, at greater cost, than it would have under Medicare. But, when Medicare's chief actuary tried to estimate the bill's true cost, his superiors threatened to fire him. Only after the legislation passed did the Bush administration admit that it would cost $134 billion more than it had previously acknowledged.

By contrast, John Kerry has a record of fiscal honesty and responsibility that continues the tradition of Bill Clinton and Robert Rubin. Unlike most Democrats, he supported the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit-reduction plan. Unlike most Republicans, he supported Clinton's 1993 deficit-reduction package. And, unlike President Bush, he supports the "pay as you go" rules that, in the 1990s,

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helped produce a budget surplus.

It is true that, in this campaign, Kerry has proposed more spending than his partial repeal of the Bush tax cut will fund. But he has also said that, if the repeal does not bring in enough revenue, he will scale back his proposals. In fact, one of the virtues of Kerry's health plan is that, unlike Clinton's, it can easily be broken down into modest reforms. Even if Kerry merely makes good on his pledge to dramatically expand Medicaid and SCHIP, programs that offer health coverage to poor children and adults, he will have done more to help struggling Americans than Bush has in his four years.

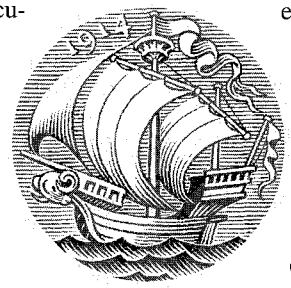
ON FOREIGN POLICY, KERRY'S record is less impressive. His vote against the 1991 Gulf war suggested a tendency to see all American military action through the distorting prism of Vietnam. And his behavior in the current Iraq debate has not been exemplary. To be fair, his position has been more consistent than his detractors give him credit for. Republicans mock him for "voting for the war" before opposing it. But Bush himself urged congressional authorization for war as a way to force U.N. inspectors back into Iraq and to disarm Saddam Hussein peacefully. It was reasonable to believe that only a credible U.S. threat of force would produce an intrusive new inspections regime (which it did). And Kerry is right that, if Bush had allowed those inspections to continue, they would have eventually revealed that Saddam lacked weapons of mass destruction and eviscerated the rationale for war.

Kerry's greater failure was his vote against the $87 billion supplemental to equip American troops and rebuild Iraq. He was right to support funding the supplemental by repealing part of the tax cut (particularly since Bush officials like Paul Wolfowitz had shamelessly suggested that the war would cost America virtually nothing). But, once that effort failed, he should have supported the legislation anyway, as Senator Joseph Biden did. Building "firehouses in Baghdad"—a notion Kerry has repeatedly mocked—is not only something we owe the Iraqi people, it stems from the fundamentally liberal premise that social development can help defeat fanaticism. Abandoning that principle under pressure from Howard Dean is the most disturbing thing Kerry has done in this campaign.

But Kerry's critics are wrong to cite his opposition to the Gulf war—and his criticism of the current Iraq war—as evidence of his supposed reluctance to forcefully wage the war on terrorism. It is conceivable that, in the coming years, the United States might need to launch military action against another Muslim regime (though, given how greatly Bush has overextended the military, it is hard to see how we would do so). But the war on terrorism is far more likely to require military action *within* states, to secure lawless areas that terrorists have exploited.

The Bush administration's misguided tendency to see Al Qaeda as the instrument of rogue governments made it more willing to use force against Iraq but less willing to use force in Afghanistan after the Taliban fell. Kerry, by contrast, seems inclined to use American power where it could genuinely damage Al Qaeda. Even during the Democratic primaries, he attacked the Bush administration for not sending U.S. troops into Tora Bora to destroy Al Qaeda and Taliban remnants in the waning days of the Afghan war. He has proposed doubling U.S. Special Forces for operations just like that. And he has proposed strengthening America's capacity to act—including even militarily—to prevent nuclear proliferation, an issue on which the Bush administration has proved astonishingly passive.

Kerry's apparent willingness to act within states is particularly important because the U.N.'s obsession with sovereignty renders it impotent in such circumstances. His support for the Kosovo war, waged without U.N. approval, is encouraging in this regard, as is his openness to using U.S. troops—presumably without the Security Council's blessing—in Darfur, Sudan. These encouraging signs counterbalance his worrying tendency to describe multilateralism—and U.N. support—as an end in itself rather than instrument of American power. If elected, this tension will likely be a theme of his presidency, as it was of Clinton's.



Critics also call Kerry a narrow realist uninterested in battling Al Qaeda in the realm of ideas. But he has suggested an ambitious effort to support democratic civil society in the Muslim world. And, while we don't know whether Kerry would actually carry out such a campaign, we know that Bush—for all his grand rhetoric—has not. The administration's Greater Middle East Initiative, supposedly its signature effort to promote democracy in the Muslim world, was gutted after protests from the very autocracies President Bush pledged to reform. And, while the Iraq war was supposed to inspire liberals throughout the region, it may be doing the opposite. Anti-Americanism has reached such toxic levels that dissidents in Muslim countries seem increasingly fearful of any association with the United States. This is the bitter fruit of an occupation conducted with such shocking arrogance and carelessness that it calls into question whether the Bush administration's pledge to turn Iraq into a model democracy was ever really sincere.

But the war against Islamist totalitarianism is not merely a struggle for Muslim minds; it is a struggle for American ones as well. In the weeks after September 11, Bush presided over a country more united—with more faith in its government—than at any other time in recent memory. He has squandered that unity and trust for the cheapest of reasons. His administration has used the war on terrorism as a bludgeon against congressional Democrats and has implied that its critics are aiding the enemy. And it has repeatedly misled the public—touting supposed evidence of Iraq's nuclear program that American intelligence analysts knew was highly dubious, rebuking General Eric Shinseki for telling the truth about how many troops it would take to occupy Iraq successfully, and firing Lawrence Lindsey for saying how much it would cost.

The result is a country bitterly divided, distrustful of its government, and weaker as a result. The next time an American president tries to use force in the war on terrorism, he will not merely lack the world's trust, he will lack much of the American people's as well. That may be Bush's most damning legacy of all. He has failed the challenge of these momentous times. John Kerry deserves a chance to do better. ■

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NOTEBOOK

JEB BUSH, NO 2000 REPEAT . . . SYRIA, NO LEBANON RETREAT

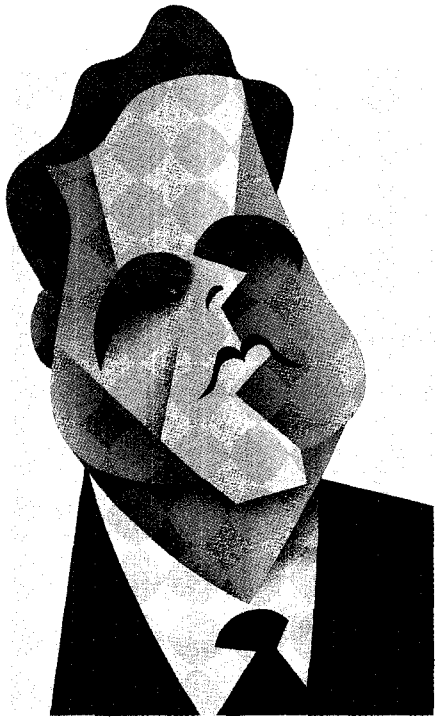
DR. ALLAWI, ARE YOU TAKING NOTES?

HOWEVER MANY CHALLENGES Iraqis face in establishing democracy, at least they don't have to contend with Jeb Bush. Since presiding over Florida's voting fiasco in 2000, the Florida governor has striven to ensure that a different, altogether more expensive, fiasco takes place in 2004.

But let's look on the bright side. At least this time there won't be paper recounts, since the state has new electronic voting machines that leave no paper trail. (Voting has already begun in Florida, with only occasional malfunctions, according to *USA Today*.) And even electronic recounts shouldn't be too much trouble. Florida managed to misplace for a few days electronic voting records from its 2002 gubernatorial primaries. Perhaps this time it can figure out how to lose such records for good.

Also, more non-felons will get to vote this time. Maybe. After mistakenly preventing thousands from voting in 2000, Florida spent nearly $2 million to create a new, improved list that would purge only the 100 percent felonious. But, after a few kinks emerged—like a few thousand eligible voters making it onto the new list anyway—Bush scrapped the whole thing, leaving individual election supervisors to devise their own systems. Should work fine.

Finally, we should be safe from too many embarrassing revelations about the governor. True, *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune* recently reported that Bush had pressed ahead with the felons list, even after officials in Florida's Department of State told him it was flawed, and, yes, the Department's inspector general has been investigating the purge list for three months now. But, while Florida law requires records from an investigation to be made public after 60 days, Florida's Department of State hasn't quite found the time to comply—and may not until after Election Day.



Jeb Bush

Criticism about all of this bothers the governor. "There are cynics out there that view people in public life to be motivated by something they're not," he said in July, when people complained about the felons list. As for the *Herald-Tribune* story about proceeding with the list, even while knowing it was defective? "Absolutely false," said Bush last Sunday on ABC's "This Week." Bush predicted that a message of optimism is "the reason why George [W. Bush] will win Florida." For the "cynics out there," some other reasons come to mind.

ASSAD STATE OF AFFAIRS

AS MANY AS 20,000 SYRIAN TROOPS occupy Lebanon—as they have for 28 years—making Bashar Al Assad the effective prime minister of his neighbor. In southern Lebanon, where Syria's surrogate terrorist militia, Hezbollah, enjoys free reign, no Lebanese flag flies at all. It was encouraging, therefore, that, on September 2, the U.N. Security Council demanded—for the first time—the withdrawal of all foreign military units from Lebanon, the cessation of Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs, and the disbanding of all irregular units within the country's borders. On October 1, Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported that the Council's demands had not been met. On October 19, the Council unanimously endorsed a statement calling on Syria to comply. By Turtle Bay standards, this constitutes political pressure. Unfortunately, on that very same day, the European Union agreed to establish a free-trade zone with Syria, something the tyrants in Damascus have coveted for nine years. In welcoming this new link to Europe, the Syrian foreign minister announced that his country would not abide by the U.N.'s recent demands. Why should it, when it knows that the continent that provides two-fifths of the permanent Security Council seats is so patently unserious about democracy, and even sovereignty, in the Middle East?

DEFENSIVE MEDICINE

SEPTEMBER 11 AND IRAQ ASIDE, the Pentagon hasn't been entirely inept on defense. When it comes to veterans with Gulf War Syndrome, the Pentagon has successfully fought them off for years.

Complaints of ailments began soon after troops returned from the 1991 war. Commonly reported symptoms included fatigue, joint pain, rashes, hair loss, and lapses of memory. But a Pentagon spokesman said in 1993, "We do not believe it is a syndrome." In 1994, a Pentagon-commissioned panel found no firm "evidence that would correlate symptoms with service in the Gulf." As the number of veterans complaining of symptoms began to rise, the Defense Department apparently decided to start denying things in earnest. "We have no confirmation of any soldier having actually been injured by any chemical agent

DAVID COWLES

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during the Gulf war," Deputy Defense Secretary John Deutch reported in 1995.

Then, in 1997, the Pentagon admitted that it had managed to lose most of the logs on Gulf war chemical warfare—no small achievement, since the logs were stored both on paper and computer disks and placed in safes in two separate locations. It didn't help when a top-secret report spilled out later that year suggesting that thousands of troops may have been exposed to chemical weapons in 1991. The Pentagon had commissioned the report, but it was "a sloppy piece of work," said Bernard Rostker, the Pentagon official handling the Gulf war illnesses, "paltry compared to the job we [at the Pentagon] have done."

Congress was evidently impressed enough with the Pentagon's un-paltry job to suggest, a few months later, that it be stripped of oversight into investigations of Gulf War Syndrome altogether. Hurt feelings ensued. "I think it's a very unfair rap to say, 'You were bad in '94, and therefore you can't be trusted again,' " complained Rostker.

Once the Pentagon began to admit that, maybe, yes, there'd been a dollop of neurotoxin exposure after all, haggles over the number of affected soldiers began. Not surprisingly, the Pentagon tended to support lower estimates. (The General Accounting Office stated last June that the Pentagon used flawed modeling to arrive at its numbers.)

So, last week, when a federal panel (the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses) broke with numerous prior medical studies to conclude that "a substantial proportion of Gulf War veterans are ill with multisymptom conditions not explained by wartime stress or psychiatric illness," it must have felt for the Pentagon like one more body on the pile-on. As Rostker might ask, is it fair to say that, just because you were bad in 1994, and in 1995, and the years until 2004, you can't be trusted again? ■

TNR.commentary

IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

EXEUNT: Late last month, the spokesman for the Iraqi foreign ministry told me that a wise move for the United States and Iraq would be for Washington to set a firm date for withdrawal. That way, the Iraqi nationalist insurgents—surely the largest faction—would have, as the spokesman, Thamir Al Adhami, put it, "a light at the end of the tunnel." That could create a potential opening to exploit the fissures in the insurgency among nationalist Iraqis, foreign terrorists, and former regime elements. That, of course, would not solve the problem of violent factions attempting to control Iraq's future. But it could potentially—*potentially*—diminish the support base of extremists, who attract Iraqis demoralized and furious over an indefinite occupation. (The Bush administration can hardly respond that a set-a-date strategy would only embolden the insurgency, since this strategy shares precisely the same logic as the administration's much-heralded June 28 handover of power—only, this time, there would be an actual end to the occupation rather than a nominal one.)

The reasoning behind Al Adhami's support for setting a date begins with the recognition that, the longer we stay, the more damage we do to our own prospects for an exit, since we associate the Iraqi institutions we need to leave behind with the despised occupation. If Iraqi leaders vocally protest our actions, as Interim President Ghazi Al Yawar has over the U.S. offensive in the Sunni Triangle, we risk making them look ineffective, which bolsters their extremist rivals. The truly "unpalatable option," as Dobbins would have it, may be that we can't afford to stay for long enough to fully train and equip Iraqi forces without seriously running the risk of crippling our exit strategy. It's a horrible prospect, and setting a date may buy us some time to alleviate its consequences somewhat. But it's a possibility we should start debating.

&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

WHAT'S UP WITH THE KERRY SLIPPAGE? The conventional wisdom on Kerry's drop in the polls these last few days is that it's a result of Kerry's Mary Cheney comment during the debate and the Cheneys' subsequent reaction. I think that's possible. But another possibility is that Kerry tends to lose ground when the focus of the campaign is domestic policy, as it was in the aftermath of the debate last week.

Why would Kerry actually lose ground during periods in which domestic policy looms large? The answer is twofold. First, people's default presumption is that Bush is stronger on national security. During periods when Kerry is constantly reminding voters what a disaster Iraq has become, as he did during the first two debates, Bush's advantage fades and Kerry makes up ground. But, when Kerry doesn't get to talk about Iraq, as was the case during and immediately after the third debate, the default presumption in favor of Bush returns and Kerry loses the ground he's made up. (If you followed *The Washington Post* tracking poll last week, you may have noticed that the overall gap between the two candidates moves pretty much in lockstep with the gap between them on Iraq.)

But that raises a second question: Even if Kerry is losing ground on national security when the discussion revolves around domestic policy, why wouldn't he make up ground on domestic policy? The answer, I think, is that Kerry's lead on domestic issues is already baked into the cake—people who favor, say, universal health care tend to favor Kerry whether he's talking about health care or not. (Conversely, people who oppose Bush on health care probably oppose him on the issue whether or not Kerry bashes the president.) So, for Kerry, a debate devoted entirely to domestic policy is useless. Worse than useless, actually, since it gives Bush an opportunity to paint him as a big-spending liberal.

Unfortunately, the *Post* tracking poll hasn't posted its internals for a few days, so I can't see how this theory stacks up. But there's some evidence that at least the Kerry campaign buys my hypothesis. I attended a Kerry rally in Tampa, Florida, this week where the topic was supposed to be health care. (The audience consisted largely of health care workers, and a big sign hanging behind the dais read AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE FOR A STRONGER AMERICA.) But, instead of talking about health care when he showed up, Kerry spent the first 15 minutes summarizing all the evidence of Bush's failure to plan for postwar Iraq, the most recent being a letter by Ricardo Sanchez, the former American commander there, complaining that his troops weren't properly equipped to fight the insurgency.

For weeks, I've been on Kerry for talking health care when he should have been talking Iraq. This afternoon was the first time I actually wondered why he was talking Iraq when he was supposed to be talking health care. Needless to say, it's a breach of protocol I think I can live with.

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Campaign Journal
Backward

BY RYAN LIZZA

THE LONG-ESTABLISHED strategy of the Bushes is that the family takes the high road while underlings of untraceable affiliation do the dirty work. It was a third-party group, the National Security PAC, that ran the Willie Horton ads against Michael Dukakis in 1988. This year, the swift boat vets kneecapped John Kerry with their attacks on his Vietnam record. With the race extremely close, Democrats have been nervously waiting for some new Bush surrogate to join the fray in the campaign's final days. On October 19, the Progress for America Voter Fund, the best-funded Republican 527 organization, unveiled a new ad they plan to run in nine critical battleground states at a cost of $14 million, the largest ad buy of the entire campaign. What was the content of this new attack ad? A dewy-eyed President Bush is shown in a well-known photo embracing a young girl on the campaign trail in Ohio. "He's the most powerful man in the world, and all he wants to do is make sure I'm safe, that I'm OK," says 16-year-old Ashley Faulkner as an emotional score plays. John Kerry is never mentioned.

There's still plenty of time for some group to go nuclear with a new anti-Kerry ad. The Sinclair Broadcast Group airs portions of its documentary attacking Kerry for his role opposing the Vietnam War on October 22, to unknown effect. And, indeed, most of the ads run this year by Progress for America have been negative: "Would you trust Kerry against these fanatic killers?" one of their spots asks, as a rogues' gallery of Al Qaeda terrorists flashes on-screen. But the Faulkner ad, which is accompanied by a massive Internet ad campaign, is all sweetness and light, $14 million of argument-free television to remind swing-state voters that the president is a good hugger. The traditional Bush strategy has been turned on its head. Instead of outsourcing hit jobs and staying above the fray, the president and Dick Cheney are going medieval on John Kerry, while their best-funded allies try to mitigate the personal damage inevitably done when the top of a ticket goes on the warpath.

BUSH'S STRATEGY FOR the homestretch is fourfold. First, elevate the attacks on Kerry. This week, Bush and Cheney sounded like they had been trolling the far corners of right-wing websites for talking points. Ever since Kerry's debate performances undercut their character-based attack on him as a flip-flopper, BC'04 has moved to a sharp ideological attack. On October 25 in New Jersey, Bush delivered a greatest-hits version of his national security case against Kerry, recapping all the half-true claims he has made this year. He argued Kerry has a September 10 worldview by taking a Kerry quote out of context. He also again distorted what Kerry meant by his awkward "global test" phrase from the debates, as well as his recent comments to *The New York Times* about reaching a point when terrorism is just a "nuisance" rather than an existential threat. (Bush apparently favors the latter.) Bush argued that Kerry is against preemption, when in fact Kerry has always said that it is a tool available to all presidents. Bush claimed Kerry "believes that fighting [Musab Al] Zarqawi and other terrorists in Iraq is a diversion from the war on terror." Iraq, of course, was not a terrorist haven until *after* the invasion, and Kerry has consistently said that, now that it has become one, Al Qaeda must be defeated there. Having set up this straw man, Bush summarized Kerry's national security strategy as "giving up the fight."

As Bush continues to play the attack dog, Cheney's chief job seems to be to scare voters. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson had "Daisy." This year, Bush has Cheney. Before the war in Iraq, it was Cheney who said, "We believe [Saddam Hussein] has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons." In Ohio this week, Cheney returned to the theme. "The biggest threat we face now as a nation," he said, "is the possibility of terrorists ending up in the middle of one of our cities with deadlier weapons than have ever been used against us—with biological agents, or a nuclear weapon, or a chemical weapon of some kind, able to threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans, not just three thousand. And that's the ultimate threat. And, for us to have a strategy that's capable of dealing with that threat and defeating it—you've got to get your mind around that concept."

BESIDES THE CASE against Kerry, there are three other parts of Bush's strategy in these final days. After getting knocked around by Kerry's attacks on Iraq just prior to, and during, the debates, Bush is returning to his convention theme, attempting to wrap himself in September 11. That's one reason he went to New Jersey to deliver his high-profile anti-Kerry speech this week. By going to New Jersey, where polls show the race to be tighter than the 16 points by which Gore won the state in 2000, Bush was also reviving Karl Rove's theory of the bandwagon effect. In 2000, Bush famously toured New Jersey and California in the closing days of the race because Rove believes some undecided voters will jump aboard whatever campaign looks like a winner at the end. In an e-mail to supporters, Bush strategist Matt Dowd also emphasized one recent poll that showed a majority of voters think Bush will win. The Bushies believe such sentiments can be self-fulfilling.

Since so much of Bush's current strategy is based on negative—often erroneous—attacks on Kerry, there are two other pieces to his endgame. One is to soften his image to counter the rising unfavorable ratings his attacks produce. This is being done by Laura Bush—whose speeches

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are testimonials about her husband rather than attacks on Kerry—and the huge positive advertising blitz by the Progress for America 527.

The final component of the strategy is unprecedented. One reason BC'04 risks using Bush to deliver its toughest attacks is that, at this point in the campaign, the volume of information bombarding voters is so overwhelming that it takes the power of words straight from the president's mouth to break through the clutter. But the White House has always relied on the press to convey Bush's message to readers and viewers in a relatively unmediated fashion. That has proved more difficult this year due to a surge in coverage that fact-checks what the candidates are saying. This development has hurt Bush more than Kerry because the president's strategy is to destroy his opponent's credibility, a tactic that, ironically enough, has relied disproportionately on false statements. The Bushies have become so frustrated by the fact-checking of the president's statements that a spokesman told *The Washington Post*'s Howard Kurtz, "The Bush campaign should be able to make an argument without having it reflexively dismissed as distorted or inaccurate by the biggest papers in the country."

In response to the media's new obsession with truth-squading the candidates, the Republican National Committee's opposition research department has started to do something remarkable: going negative on the press. "RNC Research Briefings," e-mailed to hundreds of reporters, now regularly target members of the media. On October 6, the RNC put "Hardball" host Chris Matthews, a former staffer for House Speaker Tip O'Neill, in its sights. "DEMOCRAT CHRIS MATTHEWS' SELECTIVE 'ANALYSIS,' " read the headline on a three-page press release that accused Matthews of erroneously claiming Cheney had contradicted himself during the debate when he denied tying September 11 to Saddam Hussein. Accompanying the release, the RNC posted a video online attacking Matthews. A few days later, Republicans took issue with *The New York Times*' Elisabeth Bumiller's accurate statement that, despite Bush's claims, Kerry "essentially voted for one large tax increase, the Clinton tax bill of 1993." "*THE NEW YORK TIMES* SHADES THE TRUTH," read the headline of a press release the RNC quickly put out. Next up was Ron Suskind, who wrote a critical piece in *The New York Times Magazine*. "LIBERAL DEMOCRAT SUSKIND HAS CREATIVITY BUT NOT FACTS," the RNC noted. A few days later Paul Krugman became the RNC's target. In Suskind's and Krugman's cases, the oppo was unusually personal and included unflattering pictures of the men, the kind that candidates dig up of their opponents, not of journalists.

The fact that the RNC is now devoting a good deal of its time to attacking reporters speaks volumes about how much Bush is relying on negative, unchecked distortions to secure a second term. And that means that, in its own way, the Ashley Faulkner ad—with its warm and fuzzy image of Bush—ultimately leaves voters with as false an impression as the Willie Horton ad did in 1988. ■

Why Southerners love to teach.

Class Warfare

BY NOAM SCHEIBER

TAMPA, FLORIDA

ON A SATURDAY morning about two weeks before Election Day, I follow Betty Castor, the Democratic U.S. Senate nominee from Florida, to an Albertsons supermarket in Tampa, where senior citizens began lining up at seven o'clock in the morning for scarce flu shots. By the time I arrive at around 10:15 a.m., the line has snaked around the front of the store into the deli section and the bakery. Some of the weary-looking seniors have brought lawn chairs to sit on; others have planted themselves on cases of Capri Sun and Quaker Chewy granola bars. "I came in at eight-thirty," laments one elderly woman, "and I'm number eighty-eight."

It's no surprise that people in this situation would want to talk to a Democratic politician pushing health care reform. What is surprising is that many seem more interested in reliving Castor's history in the Tampa area than in complaining about the flu-shot shortage. A middle-aged woman flags Castor to reminisce about how her father challenged Castor for a county commission seat—back in 1972. Just outside the Albertsons entrance, I notice a sixtysomething woman chatting with Castor about how their daughters graduated from high school together. "Oh, that was a great group of kids back in 1984," Castor exclaims, her green eyes gleaming. Then there's Aralia Granado, a native Tampa resident who tells me she doesn't really follow politics much. But she remembers Castor fondly from her days as president of the local University of South Florida (USF), and she intends to vote for her.

In some sense, Granado epitomizes Castor's appeal as a candidate. Recent polls show Castor in a dead heat with her Republican opponent, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez. If that's where things stand on Election Day, the conventional wisdom is that the Democrats' impressive ground operation and John Kerry's coattails in South Florida should put Castor over the top, perhaps even swinging control of the Senate to the Democrats. But, somewhat ironically for a U.S. Senate race, it probably won't be coattails or get-out-the-vote efforts that provide the margin of victory for Castor. It will be her years of experience as an educator.

CASTOR'S ROOTS IN Tampa extend back to the family of her first husband, former Hillsborough County Judge Don Castor, whose father once headed the state's anti-narcotics agency. Castor served on the local county commission and represented the

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area in the state Senate. But easily the biggest notch in her belt is the presidency of USF during the mid-'90s. "You could run over to the gas station, be at the doctor, and someone will say, 'Oh, you work for Betty Castor? She signed my diploma,'" says Deborah Reed, adds Castor's campaign manager. "When we're polling, we ask [people] what they think about her bio," adds Castor's pollster, Dave Beattie. "[USF president] is what comes up."

One reason for this, explains Don Fowler, a former head of the Democratic National Committee who currently works as a consultant and political science professor in South Carolina, is the nature of education politics in the South. During the last few decades, Southerners have formed a tentative political consensus around the idea that education is the key to catching up with the rest of the country economically. (The issue helped elect governors like Jim Hodges and Zell Miller in the 1990s.) In the Southern states that still lag far behind the rest of the country—Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina—K–12 remains the focus of these efforts. But, says Fowler, in the Southern states that have made the most economic progress since the 1960s, the focus tends to be more on public universities, which are seen as engines of their local economies. "If you look at the institutions in Florida, Virginia, and the central part of North Carolina," says Fowler, "[I]t's the absolute key to the progress that those states have made." Considered from this perspective, it's no surprise that Castor's achievements as USF president—among them, a high-tech collaboration between USF and the University of Central Florida, which nurtured the area's vibrant laser industry—have considerable political appeal. (The USF experience isn't an unambiguous plus. Castor has been dogged by allegations that she didn't take sufficient action against suspected terrorist Sami Al Arian, a USF professor indicted in 2003. Castor put him on paid leave in 1996 but relented in 1998 when no charges were filed.)

It matters, too, that these achievements have been centered in the Tampa area, whose importance to a Democrat running in Florida is difficult to overstate. Tampa is the state's largest media market, representing about 25 percent of Florida's electorate, versus about 20 percent each for Miami and Orlando. Demographically, the Tampa market closely mirrors the state as a whole—a mixture of urban centers, moderate suburbs, and rural counties. Even though some large counties, like Pinellas (home of St. Petersburg), boast GOP registration advantages, the Republicans there tend to be middle-of-the-road on social issues and sympathetic to government spending on health care and education. "These are people who gave the president a chance," says Jim Davis, a Democrat who represents the area in Congress. But, he adds, they've since been alienated by the war and Bush's conservative drift on social issues.

A sign posted prominently in the Tampa office of America Coming Together—the Democratic 527 group registering voters in Florida—reads, WHOEVER WINS TAMPA IS GOING TO BE PRESIDENT, which is probably a safe bet. The winner of the last six presidential elections has carried the area covered by the Tampa media market. According to Beattie, who also polled for the winning Senate campaign of then–Insurance Commissioner Bill Nelson in 2000, Al Gore lost in the Tampa market 51 to 49. Nelson, by contrast, carried the area 52 to 48. (These percentages exclude votes cast for third-party candidates.) Privately, Democrats believe that Castor has the potential not only to run up big margins in Tampa but also to boost John Kerry there. "She will pull a large Democratic base to the polls in Tampa," says a top official in Kerry's Florida campaign. "It's clearly helpful to us."

AS IMPORTANT AS the Tampa area is, however, Castor (and Kerry) must also fare well in Florida's northern tier, which extends from Jacksonville on the east coast to Pensacola in the western panhandle, and south to the rural counties just north of Orlando. This region accounts for about 20 percent of the state's electorate, and, with the exception of some heavily African American pockets, is far and away its most conservative. Gore wrote off the region early in the 2000 presidential campaign—and lost it by 20 points (also excluding third parties). Nelson, by contrast, campaigned hard there and garnered an impressive 45 percent of the vote, leading some to conclude that limiting losses in the North is vital for a Democrat. "People thought you could win by enough in Broward and Dade [counties]" to ensure victory, says Rod Smith, one of the few Democratic state senators currently representing the northern part of the state. "But you can't win by enough there."

Castor, who carried 68 percent of the North Florida vote in the primaries, looks poised to repeat Nelson's performance. Castor lived in Tallahassee for eight years while serving as state education commissioner and is still widely remembered in the region. Her husband, Sam Bell, a former state legislator, and his son, Doug, a Tallahassee lawyer, have been executing what they call their sheriff strategy, by which they mean aggressively courting the region's local officials, the majority of whom are still registered Democrats. "What we've had [Doug] doing is basically riding around in his truck, ... running Betty for sheriff in twenty-five counties in the north," confides one Castor strategist. A recent University of North Florida poll had Castor down only seven points in the panhandle and up one in the north central region, though with a large undecided vote.

Castor's education background may lift her performance in the North as well. According to Diane Ravitch, a New York University education historian, teachers in the South have historically been held "in high regard because they were often the most highly educated members of any community." This may help explain why the first wave of female Southern politicians—people like Ann Richards, the former governor of Texas, and Kathleen Blanco, the current governor of Louisiana—came to politics from teaching backgrounds. (Until recently, there also weren't many other careers open to educated women in the South.)

If Central Florida, with its educated moderates and recent Latino immigrants, is representative of the New South,

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then North Florida, like Mississippi and Alabama, still has a lot in common with the Old South Ravitch describes. That's good for Castor, who worked as an elementary school teacher before entering political office. Later, she chaired the education subcommittee of the state Senate Appropriations Committee. And, as state education commissioner, she followed through on a campaign promise to teach a class in every one of the state's 67 counties. It's probably safe to say that many of the people who remember her in North Florida remember her as a teacher, which only further endears her to them. "Coming from an education background does give one credibility," Castor says. "Everyone can think about their own teachers ... some teacher that's had a tremendous influence on them."

This could help Kerry, too. Democrats hold a registration advantage in North Florida, but they are notorious for voting Republican on the presidential level. Still, it's possible that the goodwill Castor evokes could be making a difference for Kerry at the margins. Unlike Gore in 2000, Kerry is actually contesting North Florida—his campaign has a presence in both Pensacola and Tallahassee, as well as an office in Jacksonville. One recent Florida poll by the American Research Group showed him down only four points in the region north of Orlando and Tampa. That finding is somewhat skewed because it includes the northeastern parts of the so-called I-4 corridor, which are considered swing territory. But Castor's internal polling also suggests Kerry is running stronger than expected in the North.

THE DAY AFTER Castor's outing to Albertsons, I'm seated at a table of Democratic activists at the West Tampa Sandwich Shop—a converted house with bars on the windows and a green stucco exterior. For years, local politicos have crammed in here on weekends to trade gossip over too-strong coffee and baskets of Cuban bread. (Former County Democratic Party Chairman Mike Scionti was a fixture at the restaurant when he helped revive the Democratic Party here in 2000.) This morning, the atmosphere inside is downright electric. The entire place is tittering about a *Tampa Tribune* editorial explaining the paper's refusal to endorse George W. Bush.

"The *Tribune* has always supported incumbent Republican presidents," says Ana Cruz, a local political operative, as she explains to me the implications of the non-endorsement. "This is huge," adds Cathy Bartolotti, a national Democratic committee member from Tampa, prompting nods around the table. But what's even more interesting is the women's take on the story behind the *Tribune* editorial: "I think Betty Castor is making good things happen at this paper," says one of them conspiratorially. "It's the Castor effect in this county." The idea that Castor could personally block a valuable newspaper endorsement is, of course, preposterous. But, on one level, it has a ring of truth. Like that good teacher everyone remembers from childhood, Castor has had a palpable effect on the county—and on the rest of Florida. In the political culture of the South, educators often do. ■

New old Carolina GOP.

At the Helm

BY JASON ZENGERLE

WILSON, NORTH CAROLINA

IT'S A SUNNY Saturday morning in this sleepy eastern North Carolina tobacco town, and Richard Burr, the Republican candidate for U.S. Senate, is being serenaded. The singers are a four-man gospel choir called Jubilation, and their tune is a lamentation for the country's moral state—and an exhortation to improve it. "Wake up America, open your eyes," goes the chorus.

Burr is in Wilson hoping to open some eyes of his own. Locked in a tight race with his Democratic opponent, Erskine Bowles, Burr, a five-term representative from Winston-Salem, wants people in this rural, socially conservative region to know that he understands their concerns—and that he is looking out for their interests. Speaking to a crowd of about 100 people outside the local GOP headquarters, Burr touts his recent role in passing legislation that ends the federal government's tobacco quota system and pays $10 billion to tobacco farmers. He reiterates his support for President Bush and the war on terrorism. And he promises to work to put conservative judges on the federal bench.

Burr's points resonate with the crowd, which gives him a rousing ovation. "The most important thing is to get more conservative judges, because liberal judges are ruining this country," says Mary Wadkins, a housewife and mother of four. Curtis Hyler, the gospel group's lead singer, says he's voting for Burr because "he has good Christian values. That's important around here."

That Burr has been coming "around here" to look for votes—his appearance in Wilson is part of a daylong RV trip through eastern North Carolina—is, in one sense, hardly a surprise. Although a majority of voters in eastern North Carolina are registered Democrats, they are socially conservative Democrats who, ever since the civil rights movement, have been just as likely to back Republicans. Indeed, over the course of his 30 years in the Senate, Republican icon Jesse Helms relied on their support to such a degree that these eastern North Carolina voters came to be known as Jessecrats. And, ever since Helms's election to the Senate in 1972, North Carolina Republicans have looked to the Jessecrats to provide their margins of victory.

But, in another sense, Burr's intense focus on eastern North Carolina is a surprise, because Burr was supposed to represent a new breed of North Carolina Republican. With the state in the midst of profound demographic changes—as its once dominant tobacco and textile industries give way to growing high-tech and banking sectors and its population shifts from rural to metropolitan areas—there had

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been a sense among North Carolina Republicans that the old methods of winning elections would no longer work. In Burr, Republicans thought, they had the perfect candidate to move the party out of the past, as exemplified by Helms, and into the future. But Burr, it turns out, isn't much of a break from tradition. Indeed, his campaign is following the old North Carolina GOP playbook almost to the letter. "Burr was seen as the bridge from the old Republican model to the new Republican model," says Ferrel Guillory, the director of the University of North Carolina's Program on Southern Politics, Media, and Public Life. "And it's looking like they haven't quite built that bridge yet." The question facing North Carolina Republicans is, if Richard Burr can't build that bridge, can anyone?

LIKE PRACTICALLY EVERY Republican in North Carolina, Burr doesn't have kind words for John Edwards (who is vacating the seat Burr is running for). But, were it not for Edwards, Burr's Senate candidacy might never have happened. Edwards's 1998 Senate victory over Republican incumbent Lauch Faircloth—an ornery old pig farmer so conservative that he referred to Helms as the state's liberal senator—served as a wake-up call for North Carolina Republicans. Edwards won because, in addition to limiting Faircloth's margin of victory in the east, he racked up huge margins in the rapidly growing metropolitan areas of Charlotte and the Research Triangle of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill—which now accounts for close to 40 percent of the state's population. Since these areas will only keep growing—demographers estimate that, between now and 2030, some counties in the Charlotte and Research Triangle areas will more than double in population—some Republicans concluded that their party could never again run a candidate whose base was in the state's population-hemorrhaging rural areas. Indeed, Republicans were so spooked by Edwards's victory that they worried even Helms would be unable to win a sixth term in 2002 in what they called "the new North Carolina."

These fears were never realized, since Helms retired after his fifth term. And, in 2002, the Republicans nominated Elizabeth Dole to replace him. She easily beat her Democratic opponent, Erskine Bowles. But Dole's public profile in North Carolina is akin to that of Oprah Winfrey's, and her candidacy hardly serves as a model for other Republicans. Going into this campaign, then, the North Carolina GOP was still searching for a new face for a new era in state politics. In Burr, they thought they'd found it. With the White House's help, they made sure Burr had no significant primary challengers. "Richard Burr's our answer to John Edwards," one prominent North Carolina Republican said before the race.

Like Edwards, the 48-year-old Burr is a handsome, personable baby boomer. He was a football star at Wake Forest University and had a successful business career in Winston-Salem before being elected to Congress in 1994. Although he came to Washington as part of the Gingrich revolution, Burr wasn't a bomb-thrower. In the House, he generally focused on economic and regulatory matters, and he largely ignored divisive social issues. While Burr has a solidly conservative voting record, he's usually described in the press as a moderate. Even liberals like *Wall Street Journal* columnist Al Hunt call him "able, a decent man, not, in North Carolina GOP circles, a hater like the Jesse Helms crowd." In other words, he was the perfect candidate for Republicans to send into the vote-rich suburbs that Edwards dominated six years ago.

Burr began his Senate campaign with this moderate approach. His early commercials were soft and gauzy, featuring breast cancer survivors and sick but now healthy children. In the ads' disclaimers, he appeared with his wife and two teenage boys to say, "I'm Richard Burr, and we all approved this message." Burr also steered clear of wedge issues. Asked in March about same-sex marriages, he said he would support a constitutional amendment to ban them only as "the last resort." But this strategy didn't seem to be working. In early September, Burr, according to most polls, trailed his Democratic opponent, Bowles—who, just two years earlier, had been trounced by Dole—by ten points statewide, and he was behind by even more in Charlotte and the Triangle, the two places where this sort of approach was supposed to pay off.

So, in mid-September, Burr changed strategy: He was going to play for the old Republican base. He launched a series of harsh TV ads against Bowles, linking him to Bill Clinton—still reviled among North Carolina conservatives—for whom Bowles had served as White House chief of staff. "Erskine Bowles," the ads intoned, "he wants it both ways—just like Bill Clinton." Burr also went after Bowles on gay marriage, attacking him for not supporting the constitutional amendment Burr once called "the last resort." In one radio advertisement the Burr campaign has been airing in the eastern part of the state, a woman says, "It's a shame Erskine Bowles doesn't have the courage to stand up for traditional marriage." Burr adds, "I authorized this message because our values and beliefs are under assault by the liberal elite in Washington." Meanwhile, the National Republican Senatorial Committee cut an ugly, nativist TV ad accusing Bowles of favoring increased government benefits to immigrants.

There were those who thought this old GOP strategy would never work again. And, given the state's demographic trends, it doesn't have much promise in the long term. But the strategy apparently may have enough juice left to propel one last candidate to Washington. Although Bowles continues to lead Burr in Charlotte and the Triangle, Burr is now trouncing Bowles in eastern North Carolina, and, thanks to his increased popularity with Jessecrats, Burr has a slight lead statewide. In the campaign's final weeks, he is largely ignoring the metro regions. Burr's strategy now, the University of North Carolina's Guillory explains, is to try to make his "margin in the east so big that he'll be able to win the whole thing."

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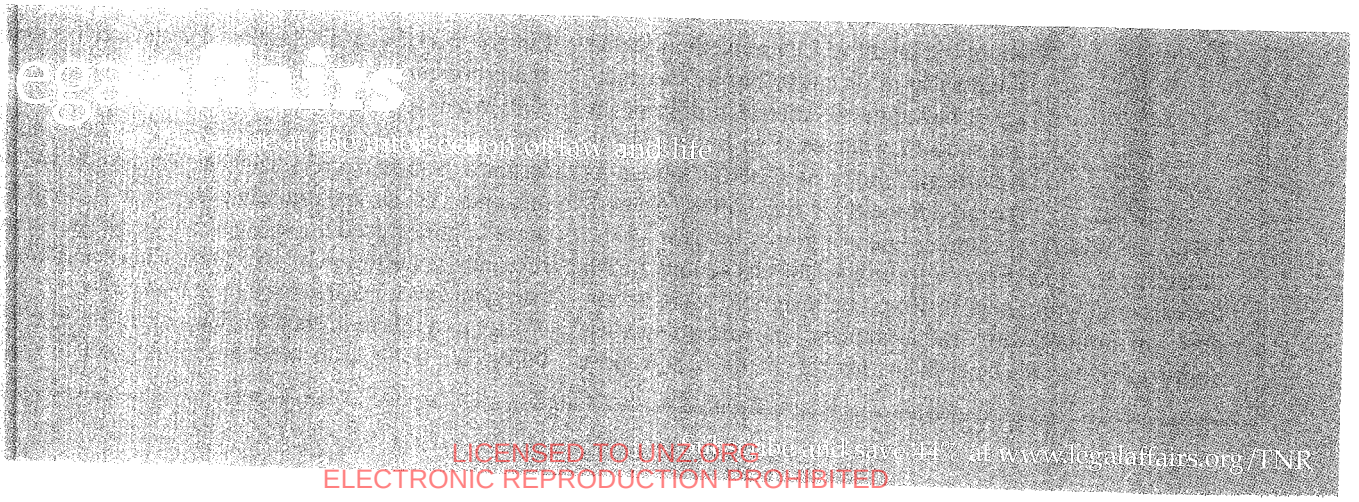

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OF COURSE, THE best way to appeal to Jessecrats and secure big margins in eastern North Carolina is to enlist the aid of Helms himself. The retired senator recently cut a radio ad for Burr. And he is even hitting the campaign trail—as he did last weekend, appearing with Burr at an event near the eastern North Carolina town of Goldsboro.

Helms is 83 years old and in declining health. He wears two hearing aids and uses a walker. At the event outside of Goldsboro, he has to be helped up to the stage, where he delivers his remarks while seated. Even as a young man, when he defended segregation as a commentator on the Raleigh TV station WRAL, Helms was never an eloquent speaker; age and health haven't helped matters. Addressing a crowd of about 200 gathered in a tobacco barn, Helms's speech is slow and slurred, and he all but says it is his dying wish that people vote for Burr. "He's a conservative, fine, Christian man, and you can count on him," Helms says. "North Carolina needs him in the Senate."

And then Burr, like so many North Carolina Republicans before him, pays homage to Helms. Gazing at the retired senator, he exclaims: "I'm proud to say that Jesse Helms never changed one bit in the five terms he served in the United States Senate, from the Jesse Helms we used to watch on WRAL, ... to the Jesse Helms that sits in front of you today—he is exactly the same guy. ... He believes what North Carolinians believe, and we cherish the consistency that he represents North Carolina with." Turning away from Helms, Burr pauses and faces the crowd. "I'm here today to look you in your eyes and ask you for your vote," he says, "not just for Richard Burr, but for candidates who reflect the type of values and beliefs that you have." If Richard Burr is the future of the North Carolina GOP, then the future doesn't look so different from the past. ■

How stem cells change abortion.

Life Altering

BY MICHAEL KINSLEY

THE ONE UNAVOIDABLY admirable thing about the Right to Life movement is the selflessness of its cause. For all the damage it has done to American politics (as the seed of what used to be called the New Right and is now better known as the government of the United States), for all the misery it would create if it got its way, for all the thuggishness of its rhetoric and sometimes its actions, for all the essential wrongness of what it believes and wants to impose on nonbelievers, the organized movement against abortion rights must be given this tip of the hat: Almost uniquely among powerful interest groups, it is dedicated to the interests of someone else. Or, rather, something it believes to be someone else.

Although I have not checked, I suspect there are no fetuses on the board of the National Right-to-Life Committee. Right-to-lifers are the anti-AARP: looking out for innocents at the beginning of life, rather than politicizing geriatric self-obsession near life's end.

The right-to-life cause demands selflessness from others as well. It calls upon fully formed humans, who hold all the controls, to defer to a group that is utterly powerless: fetuses. But, once you decide that humanity—and full human rights—begin at the moment of conception, there isn't much choice, is there?

So the task of the right-to-life movement has been to persuade people that human life begins at conception. And it's not a tough case to make. There is a comforting intuitive logic to it. Any other line you might draw—birth? second trimester? age 18?—raises the question of how you can confer humanity on a being just this side of the line and deny it to a virtually identical one just the other side.

What makes the sale easier, though, is that abortion doesn't fully test the premise that human life and moral equality with every other human life begin at conception. On one side, you have a fetus, several weeks or months along from conception, with perhaps the beginnings of real human characteristics: tiny arms and legs, rudimentary brains. Abortion kills that, whatever it is. On the other side, you have something serious at stake for an indisputable human being, but it is usually something less than life. A woman's right to choose is important, but, if the fetus is a human being, its life is at stake. Obviously, if you accept that, the fetus wins.

THE STEM-CELL controversy is different. On one side is not a fetus some distance along the way to birth, but an embryo just days after conception. You need a microscope to see it. And what you see is a few dozen cells. There is nothing physically human about it—nothing that even resembles the most primitive animal or plant. Any humanity you confer on it must derive from faith, not observation or logic.

This time, human life is at stake on the other side. And not just a single human life, but potentially many if stem-cell research realizes its potential. That is a big if, of course. But it is an if that can be assessed with facts, not one that depends completely on faith. And the facts look good. Especially when you include the fact that stem-cell research uses embryos that are produced but not used in the booming business of in vitro fertilization. Thousands are destroyed or, at best, frozen indefinitely every year. A small fraction of these might be used for medical research. The odds that this research will ultimately save more than one human life for each embryo used are more than favorable.

None of this matters if a microscopic embryo is a human being. We don't grab innocent people off the streets and

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take their body parts—even if one man's parts could save half a dozen lives. But stem cells frame the issue more starkly than abortion. And more personally. How many people on either side of the abortion debate face the possibility of being in a situation where they might consider an abortion? Some, but not nearly as many as those who face the possibility of getting a disease that stem-cell research might cure.

In short, stem cells make the essential premise of the right-to-life movement a much harder sell. It's a real person like you, or it's many people like you, or it's actually you—versus that microscopic dot. The selflessness required to say, "OK, I'll suffer and die prematurely so that this dot can stay frozen for the next thousand years," is much more dramatic than the mostly theoretical selflessness involved in opposing abortion.

Recognizing this unfortunate constraint, the opponents of stem-cell research have nearly abandoned their principled argument—the one thing that made their cause sympathetic. In California, where the November ballot includes a proposal for the state to spend $3 billion over ten years on stem-cell research, the organized opposition barely mentions the word embryo. The pitch is mostly about side issues, such as whether the referendum language could be interpreted as lowering the standards of informed consent for people who sign up for research experiments.

And, in the national debate about the federal near-ban on embryonic stem-cell research, supporters of the ban harp on the allegedly great promise of stem cells taken from the bone marrow of adults, which are blessedly uncontroversial. As someone who stands to benefit most from early breakthroughs if they happen (I have Parkinson's), I have nothing against spending lots of money on research with adult stem cells. Bring it on. Please. But whatever promise there is in adult stem cells doesn't negate the promise of embryonic ones.

Scientists overwhelmingly believe that embryonic stem cells are more promising, and they rail against Bush's restrictions on research. Opponents of this research ludicrously insist that scientists are ignoring the promise of adult stem cells for political reasons—a hatred of embryos so fanatical that these scientists apparently prefer the pleasure of slaughtering them to the glory of curing terrible diseases. Obviously, it is the research opponents who have let politics cloud their judgment, or simply make them liars, about a question of science. This way, they don't have to ask people point-blank to give up their lives or their hopes of good health for a microscopic dot.

The stem-cell debate inevitably affects the older argument about abortion. Once you decide that a five-day-old embryo maybe isn't as human as you or me, the tempting logical clarity of the absolutist right-to-life position disappears. The slippery slope suddenly slopes the other way. The possibility that human life emerges gradually, like so much in nature, and doesn't turn on instantly like an electric light, doesn't seem so implausible. Does this mean that people are hypocrites? No, it means that people are human. ■

The GOP kills voter reform.

HAVAC

BY ALEC APPELBAUM

On August 10, Peggy Tibbetts went to vote in Colorado's state primary at the same Garfield County polling place she has used for eight years. But she never cast a ballot. Poll workers barred Tibbetts from voting because she wasn't carrying identification. A supervisor offered her a provisional ballot but advised her that it probably wouldn't be counted.

Tibbetts had run smack into Colorado's interpretation of a 2002 federal law called the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). HAVA, requires ID checks on new voters who register by mail. But a lawsuit filed by Colorado Common Cause on behalf of Tibbetts and two other voters contends that Colorado overstepped the law by demanding identification for *all* voters. "They went so far beyond HAVA that they tripped over the Constitution," says Colorado Common Cause Director Pete Maysmith. Voters in South Carolina, South Dakota, New Mexico, Florida, and elsewhere also say officials, citing HAVA, have interfered with voting. As it happens, these officials are probably violating HAVA. But, since the law left states free to implement HAVA as they saw fit, local officials like the ones Tibbetts encountered are likely to decide who gets to vote on November 2.

The main purpose of HAVA was to require states to create voter databases that would help them screen out mistaken or ineligible ballots by January of this year. Though they could have gotten federal money to create these computerized registries, 41 legislatures took waivers, allowing them to put the databases on hold until 2006. Nonetheless, the Help America Vote Act will affect this November's elections—just not in the way its name implies. Instead of building comprehensive voting systems, Republican officials in several states are exploiting HAVA's voter-identification requirements to disenfranchise likely Democratic voters.

The ID rules in HAVA have their roots in the Ford-Carter Commission, a bipartisan effort that, in 2001, recommended changes to voting procedures in the wake of the 2000 Florida election debacle. Many of the Commission's recommendations were eventually adopted by Congress—as part of HAVA. But so was the Commission's ambiguity about using ID rules to protect voters' rights and diminish the risk of fraud. Tova Andrea Wang, who staffed the 2001 Commission, says, "ID was the most controversial provision when this whole thing was being hashed out."

The question of how to verify that a voter belongs at a

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polling place provokes strong partisan sentiments, because small errors have decided dozens of races. John Mark Hansen, a University of Chicago scholar who researched voter identification for the 2001 Commission, found that, since 1948, 32 senators, 41 governors, and 31 electoral college slates prevailed by less than a 1 percent margin. Hansen also found that roughly 5 percent of Americans have no photo identification. And these Americans tend to be poorer, less educated, and more urban. Since Democrats historically have outnumbered Republicans in this demographic, each party suspects the other of manipulating voter rolls. "Republicans are convinced that Democrats pack a lot of noncitizens [onto the rolls], and Democrats are convinced that Republicans pile on unnecessary restrictions," says Hansen.

When Congress considered election reform in 2002, these divisions came to a head. Missouri Republican Senator Kit Bond blamed bogus voter registrations—including those of corpses and at least one spaniel—for fellow Missourian John Ashcroft's squeaker loss in his 2000 Senate race. While reporters dwelled on the perils of new voting machines, Bond marshaled Republican forces to embed strict voter-identification requirements into federal law. Two Democrats, New York's Chuck Schumer and Oregon's Ron Wyden, countered by trying to make a signature an acceptable form of identification. Republicans defeated this idea by invoking the possibility of massive election fraud. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania warned that someone "dead or never in existence" could use a signature to mask an illegitimate vote. The Republicans had another, implicit argument: A law that demands physical documents makes things easier on local officials. "Signature validation imposes significant costs on election administrators," noted Hansen's 2001 report. "Proof of identity places burdens on voters, especially voters who are poor and urban."

HAVA struck a compromise between these burdens. It requires identification only from people who register for the first time by mail. The identification can be a bank statement, utility bill, driver's license, or another government document. And, even if a voter never provides identification, a poll worker must give the voter a provisional ballot. By requiring identification only from newcomers who haven't visited the county clerk's office, HAVA entrusts local election officials to decide whether voters are who they claim to be. And it ultimately protects voters by telling states to set up rules for counting provisional ballots. "HAVA does not require identification in order to have a vote counted," says Wendy Weiser, a lawyer with New York University's Brennan Center for Justice. But many Republican election officials are conducting this year's vote as if it does.

Around the country, GOP officials are downplaying or ignoring HAVA's voter protections. South Carolina's election workers' manual—authorized by the state elections commission, which is chaired by a Republican—contradicts HAVA's provisional ballot requirements. "If a person presents himself ... without a valid [photo ID or registration certificate]," it says, "he/she should not be allowed to vote." In Colorado, where the chief election officer is also a Republican, the new voter registration form lists a driver's license or state-issued ID number as "required," even though the law allows other documents. And, in Bond's home state of Missouri, the law lets partisan poll workers waive ID requirements. It requires documents from "some government agency" or a post-secondary school at the polling place. (Poorer people are less likely to attend college.) But, if Ashcroft leaves his wallet in the car, he'll have no hassle. "Personal knowledge of the voter by two supervisory election judges is acceptable voter identification," says the law. Hypothetically, partisan election judges could waive in voters from their own party whom they "recognize," while barring others from the polling place.

In South Carolina's coastal Georgetown County, the list of acceptable identifications excludes entitlement cards, such as Social Security and Medicare cards. Fearing that these rules would make it too difficult for many poor people to register, a Democratic activist named Carol Winans decided to conduct a door-to-door registration drive. But, when she went to collect blank registration forms for this effort, county election commission Chairman Herb Bailey, a Republican, refused to let her have them. Bailey told me that the state election commission advised him to cut off volunteer registration efforts, on the grounds that voters can register themselves easily enough: "It might not be my personal preference, but it's the law." But Winans smells partisan trickery. "They saw Democrats volunteering and said, 'Carol, why would you want all these uninformed voters who don't take the trouble to register themselves?' " she says.

Some ID rules seem specially designed to help Republicans in this year's key races. Colorado's tight Senate race pits Pete Coors, a Republican, against Attorney General Ken Salazar. Colorado Progressive Coalition Co-Director Bill Vandenberg says his organization has registered over 9,000 new Latino voters—likely Salazar supporters—since June. But a September 13 ruling by Donetta Davidson, Colorado's Republican secretary of state, says that, if a voter goes to the wrong precinct and gets a provisional ballot, the state will only count the ballot's presidential and vice-presidential vote. That matters politically, since new voters are likelier than seasoned ones to get confused about precincts and show up at the wrong polling place. (On October 14, an Ohio judge nixed an edict from the Republican secretary of state that would have refused ballots to voters in the wrong precinct; a Colorado judge upheld Davidson's finer formulation at around the same time. Democrats in Michigan and unions in Florida have brought similar cases.)

In New Mexico, where Bush lost by 366 votes in 2000, conservatives sued to require identification from anyone who signed up in a voter-registration drive. Secretary of State Rebecca Vigil-Giron, a Democrat, said identification was required only from voters who mail in forms—just as HAVA prescribes. A judge upheld Vigil-Giron's interpretation on September 7. But Senator Pete Domenici hurried into the fray on September 21, introducing a stand-alone federal

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law that would apply ID requirements to registration drives. (The law is sitting in committee.) "You can't fix [voter fraud] in the state courts because every state judge I know—and, I hate to say it, because they are nice guys and nice ladies—they all are, with few exceptions, partisan Democrats," Domenici told the Scripps-Howard News Service. Appellate judges ruled in Vigil-Giron's favor on September 28.

But it is poll workers, not judges, who will largely determine what happens on Election Day, and a case in South Dakota suggests that Republicans can exploit legal confusion. A 2003 law in that state allows signed affidavits as identification, but voters on or near Indian reservations testified that officials barred them from a June 1 primary for not carrying documents. Bret Healy, a former head of the South Dakota Democratic Party, runs a voter-access organization called the Four Directions Committee. He mounted a campaign to get postings at each polling place to explain that affidavits were legit—a vital point for Native Americans who often don't carry government-issued cards. Healy's campaign succeeded in time for November 2. But he still expects trouble. "The message that you don't need an ID never sunk in with election workers," he says.

The basic problem is that Congress has legislated rational voting processes but not obliged states to act rationally. "Under HAVA, every state is supposed to have an administrative complaint procedure," Wang says. "This has been completely ignored." So poll workers referring to state interpretations of HAVA will determine who gets to vote on November 2. And, now that having identification on Election Day has become a partisan issue, cliffhanger races may depend on how long people like Peggy Tibbetts are willing to stand in a polling place and argue. ■

Will Yucca Mountain sink Bush?

Nuclear Option

BY MICHAEL CROWLEY

YUCCA MOUNTAIN, NEVADA

Someday, this hunk of rock may be packed with lethal radioactive waste, and, in two weeks, it could be blamed for costing George W. Bush the presidency. But, for now, the view from atop Yucca Mountain is quite peaceful. In one direction are the Funeral Mountains rising over California's Death Valley. In another, the dim outline of the faraway Rockies. And all around stretches a yellow-brown desert valley. This view has probably remained unchanged for millennia. Although I'm in the middle of a U.S. military training area, no signs of civilization are visible—only scrub brush, rocks, and the occasional brown lizard slithering across a boulder.

The Energy Department guides who have led my tour group up here are eager to show that storing waste in Yucca Mountain won't disrupt human activity. One of them, a chipper fellow named Max, even jokes that it could be good for business. Noting that one of the proposed rail lines to bring waste to Yucca would run just past Nevada's Shady Lady brothel, Max adds cheerily, "The owner said she wouldn't mind so long as we set up a work camp right behind it!"

Not many Nevadans would laugh along. Locals despise the Yucca Mountain project, which, if all goes according to current plans, will turn this site into the country's central repository for commercial nuclear waste. Within a decade, up to 77,000 tons of lethal radioactive material from around the nation would be shipped here by truck and rail and sealed in tunnels deep inside the mountain. There it would stay, ensconced in thick casks and mountain rock, for tens of thousands of years as it slowly deteriorates into harmless junk.

Nevadans tend to see that future differently. They talk of terrorist attacks on waste shipments, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, contaminated groundwater, three-headed lizards, and the like. Those sentiments could have profound political implications for Bush on November 2. Campaigning here four years ago, Bush was vague about his position on Yucca, leaving some people with the impression that he opposed the project. He carried Nevada by four points. But, in February 2002, Bush backed an Energy Department recommendation to proceed with waste storage at Yucca, and Congress went along. Locals shrieked of betrayal.

This year, anger at Bush over Yucca has helped to make Nevada among the most highly contested of swing states, and, in a close election, its five electoral votes could prove decisive. Pouncing on the issue, the Kerry campaign, MoveOn.org, and the Democratic National Committee have all hammered Bush with ads accusing him of tricking Nevada voters. And Kerry has offered a stark Yucca alternative. "When I'm president of the United States, I'll tell you about Yucca Mountain: Not on my watch! No!" he bellowed at a summer rally in Las Vegas. "Yucca Mountain is the number-one issue facing Nevada," explains Jon Summers, spokesman for the Nevada Democratic Party. "This is a character issue. We've been misled on Yucca just like we've been misled on Iraq."

If Yucca Mountain turns out to be the cause of Bush's defeat, it would be a shame for two reasons. The first is that Bush never did lie to Nevadans about his plans for Yucca. He merely pledged to veto any plan to establish a "temporary" storage site in Nevada, a proposal under discussion in 2000, and he vowed to proceed with a permanent site only after studies had established the Yucca plan was based on "sound science." The second, and more important, reason is

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that the Yucca Mountain project is a good idea. Storing America's nuclear waste here is the safest practical option now available. Indeed, it's a rare Bush policy decision that would benefit the national interest but could cost him electoral votes. (As opposed to, say, Bush's use of steel tariffs to pander to states like West Virginia and Pennsylvania.) With so many good reasons for Bush's defeat, it would be more than a little ironic if the final blow was prompted by something he actually did right.

A TRIP TO YUCCA MOUNTAIN begins in Las Vegas, which lies 90 miles to the southeast. I meet an Energy Department tour bus at one of several Yucca Mountain visitor centers now open in Nevada cities to educate and assuage the public. The center looks like the site of a high school science fair, filled with easy-to-read signs and diagrams explaining the nature of radiation, nuclear power, and the mountain itself in simple and reassuring terms. ("All nuclear waste destined for repository disposal will be in solid form and is not flammable or explosive," assures one leaflet.) A handbook titled "The Nuclear Waste Primer" is available, as are souvenir mock-uranium fuel pellets.

Our bus rolls up a desolate desert highway for a couple of hours—one Yucca opponent tells me these buses purposefully drive slowly to make the site seem as distant as possible—until we arrive at the Nevada Test Site, a huge swath of desert that the Energy Department uses to tinker with explosives, rockets, and nuclear weapons. Special Forces train here, too. At the entry gate, where photos are forbidden, armed guards in black sunglasses inspect our bus before we're allowed to ride the final 30 miles to Yucca.

The mountain itself is less an archetypal rocky peak than a big sloping hill. After donning bright red construction helmets and plastic goggles, we file into the one long tunnel that has been bored through the mountain to allow for geological research and experiments as the political and regulatory processes surrounding the project play out. The narrow tunnel, floored with a metal walkway and lined with long ventilation tubes, has a science-fiction look reminiscent of those claustrophobic spaceship corridors from *Alien*. It's a fitting scene for the discussion at hand.

"One system we're looking at is a flying robot," says a no-nonsense Energy Department engineer named Bruce Reinert. He's explaining what would happen inside the mountain should the nuclear waste ever arrive. Sealed in huge, reinforced steel casks, the waste would be stored in yet-to-be-drilled tunnels throughout the mountain. The hot spent fuel will turn those tunnels into 400-degree ovens, making them very difficult to monitor. One idea is to pack cameras in dry ice and quickly roll them in and out of the tunnels; occasional passes by flying robots is another.

But all that remains years away. It will be at least 2010 before any waste arrives at Yucca. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission still needs to sign off on the undertaking—a three- to four-year process—and then a massive, $58 billion construction project will be needed to hollow out the mountain and build rail lines to its entrance.

Congress first approved Yucca as a repository site in 1987—as part of what is known here as the "Screw Nevada" bill—to make good on its 1982 promise to dispose of nuclear reactor waste, which creates huge liabilities and security problems for utility companies. But the project has been delayed by Nevada's endless stalling tactics, including the Republican governor's efforts to cut off the site's water supply. That's too bad. September 11 underscored the folly of storing, as we do now, huge amounts of nuclear waste at 131 sites of varying security in 39 states, many of them near urban areas, such as New York, Denver, and Dallas. As THE NEW REPUBLIC's Gregg Easterbrook recently argued, "If you're against Yucca Mountain, you're in favor of keeping atomic waste in rusting holding ponds" ("Turn On," October 18).

Yucca opponents offer two central objections to the plan. The first is that the mountain itself is an unsafe site. One top aide to a senior Nevada politician sums it up this way: "Would you want seventy-seven thousand tons of the deadliest substance known to man buried in a volcanic region near a fault line amongst rising water tables forty-five minutes from your front door?" But this is alarmist. There is volcanic activity in the region, but none within Yucca. The Energy Department estimates the chances of an eruption at Yucca at one in 70 million per year. There is a nearby fault line, but it's been 50,000 years since the last significant earthquake. And quakes do almost all their damage above ground: The waste at Yucca would be buried 1,000 feet *under* the mountain. Finally, geological evidence shows that never in the past few million years has the water table, which is currently 1,000 feet below the proposed repository, risen more than 400 feet. Yucca opponents also complain that the government can't promote that the site will remain safe for a mind-warping 300,000 years, when the waste will become harmless. But the Energy Department has pronounced the site safe for the next 10,000 years, making Yucca the closest thing to a permanent solution man can devise.

The second objection is that transporting all that waste across the country is far more dangerous than just leaving it where it is. That is the case Las Vegas's Democratic mayor, Oscar Goodman, makes when I visit his office. A few years ago, Goodman—no doubt horrified by what "glowing" Vegas Strip jokes could do to tourism—passed an ordinance outlawing the shipment of high-level waste through his city. Goodman argues that waste shipments would be highly vulnerable to accidents and, especially, terrorist attacks. "I'm not worried about the mountain. I'm worried about the transportation," Goodman says. "The rails that go right through my city and"—he points out the window—"right past my office are going to be carrying this crap." Other Yucca opponents fulminate about "one hundred thousand dirty bombs on the road," traversing the country and passing through major urban areas.

But this argument, too, doesn't hold up. The government has ferried spent nuclear fuel and nuclear weapons material

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via highways and rails since the 1950s without a major accident. And enormous precautions would be taken with waste sent to Yucca—everything from armed escorts to decoy trucks to satellite-based GPS tracking systems. The transport casks are also astonishingly resilient. On the bus home from Yucca, we are shown a short film featuring an almost comical sampling of stress tests performed on them. These include a transport truck crashing into a wall at high speed, a rocket-powered train plowing through a parked dump truck, and a cask dropped into a 1,400-degree jet-fuel fire for 90 minutes. The casks survived it all.

JUST IN TIME for the campaign's home stretch, a new round of Yucca ads hit the Nevada airwaves last week. "George Bush broke his word as president, pushing ahead with a nuclear dump that is a danger to Nevadans," says the state's popular Democratic senator, Harry Reid, in the latest spot. "John Kerry has stood with us. He has fought Yucca in the past, and as president he'll stop it once and for all. ... Nevadans need John Kerry as president to protect all our families."

While it's not fair to say Bush "broke his word," the GOP has undermined its high ground by happily reciprocating the dishonesty. Bush ads have accused Kerry of—can you guess?—flip-floppery: "Listening to John Kerry, you'd think he has been against Yucca Mountain his entire career. But Kerry voted to establish the nuclear repository at Yucca Mountain. Kerry voted seven times to make it easier to dump waste at Yucca." That's misleading: Kerry's ostensible votes for Yucca were actually votes for a much larger bill with pro-Yucca language in it that only Nevadans saw as a single-issue vote. As the Associated Press has concluded, "Each time Kerry has faced the simple choice of voting whether or not to send waste to Yucca Mountain, he has voted against it."

For the moment, Bush appears to be clinging to a small but shrinking lead in Nevada, and Yucca seems to be costing him. Nevada is a generally Republican state, where seven of eight statewide officials are GOPers and where the economy is outperforming the nation's with a mere 4 percent unemployment rate. The consensus here seems to be that Yucca will be a—and possibly *the*—deciding factor. "If only a few thousand votes are going to decide who wins, maybe Yucca can ... make the difference," says Las Vegas political commentator Jon Ralston. As one Nevada Democrat puts it, "If Bush wasn't concerned [about Yucca], they wouldn't have gone up with an ad trying to muddy the issue by saying that Kerry flip-flopped. ... [I]f Kerry carries the state by a few points, it's because of Yucca Mountain." And thus, if Nevada decides the election for Kerry, George Bush will have met a fate worthy of Greek tragedy: defeated for a rare act of political courage. ■

And you thought voting for a president was hard.

★ ★ ★ The 2004 National Book Award Finalists ★ ★ ★

Nonfiction

- ❍ Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (Henry Holt & Company, LLC)
- ❍ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (Oxford University Press)
- ❍ Jennifer Gonnerman, *Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
- ❍ Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (W.W. Norton & Company)
- ❍ The 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States—Authorized Edition* (W.W. Norton & Company)

Fiction

- ❍ Sarah Shun-lien Bynum, *Madeleine is Sleeping* (Harcourt, Inc.)
- ❍ Christine Schutt, *Florida* (TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern University Press)
- ❍ Joan Silber, *Ideas of Heaven: A Ring of Stories* (W.W. Norton & Company)
- ❍ Lily Tuck, *The News from Paraguay* (HarperCollins*Publishers*)
- ❍ Kate Walbert, *Our Kind: A Novel in Stories* (Scribner)

Poetry

- ❍ William Heyen, *Shoah Train* (Etruscan Press)
- ❍ Donald Justice, *Collected Poems* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- ❍ Carl Phillips, *The Rest of Love* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
- ❍ Cole Swensen, *Goest* (Alice James Books)
- ❍ Jean Valentine, *Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems, 1965-2003* (Wesleyan University Press)

Young People's Literature

- ❍ Deb Caletti, *Honey, Baby, Sweetheart* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)
- ❍ Pete Hautman, *Godless* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)
- ❍ Laban Carrick Hill, *Harlem Stomp!: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance* (Megan Tingley Books/Little, Brown & Company)
- ❍ Shelia P. Moses, *The Legend of Buddy Bush* (Margaret K. McElderry Books/Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division)
- ❍ Julie Anne Peters, *Luna: A Novel* (Megan Tingley Books/Little, Brown & Company)

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A Democratic ownership society.

Pro Choice

BY ANDREI CHERNY

FOUR YEARS AGO, George W. Bush's fall campaign centered on a domestic agenda that he said would put trust in people rather than big government bureaucracies. He ran on ideas like Social Security privatization and school vouchers. But, since he took office, his virtual silence on these proposals has been so overwhelming as to make his vanished "compassionate conservative" agenda look like a Bush administration centerpiece.

Now, with the campaign racing toward Election Day, these ideas—reformulated as parts of Bush's much-vaunted "ownership society"—are again front and center in his campaign speeches and advertising. And it's not just because he has nothing else to say that can reasonably pass as a second-term domestic plan. It is because the ideas respond to a real hunger among Americans.

Columnists like David Brooks and Alan Murray have pointed to Bush's "ownership society" as a potential building block of a new conservative outlook now that the era of big tax cuts has ended (thanks to the budget deficit). With many Democrats still wandering in the political bewilderedness, searching for a guiding philosophy now that the era of big government has ended, the party needs to seize political ground that can and should be its twenty-first-century home.

FIRST, A LOOK back. In late September 2000, it became fashionable to compare that year's presidential race to the contest of 1988. A sitting vice president was running in the shadow of a popular though scandal-tarred president against a reformist governor. The vice president had fallen behind in the spring but came roaring out of his convention and established a clear lead in the polls long after Labor Day. In this analogy, Bush was Michael Dukakis and Al Gore was headed to the White House.

There is little need to recount (pun intended) what transpired. It is a sordid tale of sighs in debates and "subliminable" messages in commercials descending into a final morass of butterfly ballots and black robes. But the all-but-untold story of how Bush turned his campaign around that year is worth remembering for what it tells us about his campaign in 2004—and Democrats' chances as they head into the final stretch.

Throughout September 2000, Bush lagged three to eleven points behind Gore in polls of registered voters. But, in the second half of that month, he adopted a new strategy that worked. Outlining a vision of government that gave Americans more control over their daily lives, he began emphasizing issues like privatizing Social Security, medical savings accounts, and school vouchers—the types of proposals that today make up his "ownership society" theme. He stitched them together to reach out to an increasingly educated, self-confident, and empowered middle class with the promise of more individual choice and personal power.

Just as importantly, he used these ideas to make two powerful claims. First, that he trusted "the good people of this America to make decisions for their children and their families" while his opponent believed that "Washington ought to decide on behalf of the people in this country." Second, that he was a reformer who would change government to make it more relevant to a time when people worked and lived in ways very different than the environment that had spawned the top-down bureaucratic programs of the previous century.

When Bush unveiled this rhetoric, the Gore campaign pounced immediately—issuing a 3,500-word written rebuttal that dismissed the theme and showed why the policies wouldn't work. Yet, for more than a month, Gore did little to confront Bush's basic charge or demonstrate why he had a stronger vision when it came to empowering citizens. In fact, Gore—through his reinventing-government initiative—had not only significantly updated the workings of what had been a Mainframe Age (if not Machine Age) government, he had done more to pare down the size of the federal workforce than anyone in American history. It was only his campaign's silence on this issue that allowed him to be pegged as a "big government liberal."

To be sure, throughout the campaign, one could see glimmers of what a real duel over decision-making power might look like on the airwaves. In one of his commercials on health care, Bush had claimed, "Al Gore's prescription plan forces seniors into a government-run HMO. Governor Bush gives seniors a choice." A Gore ad stated that, "under Gore, seniors choose their own doctor" while, with Bush's plan, "they have no choice." In a Spanish language ad, Bush stated his belief that "parents can choose the best school for their children." Earlier, Gore's education ad promised "to give parents more choice in choosing public schools." But, for the most part, choice was never a major element of the Gore campaign.

It was only in the last two weeks before the election that Gore, having fallen behind, made a major thrust to retake this ground. In Little Rock, Arkansas, on October 24, 2000, he said he would "promote change and choice, not new bureaucracies that tell people what to do" while Bush "would turn government over to the special interests and give them

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more power over our lives." Four days later, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, he said, "My goal is to empower families so that you have more choices and more control." But, for Gore, it was too little too late.

THIS YEAR, IN the weeks leading up to the Republican convention, Bush returned to his 2000 campaign rhetoric. And, having lost momentum after a faltering performance in the first presidential debate, Bush sharpened it. "My opponent wants to empower government; I want to use government to empower people. My opponent seems to think all the wisdom is found in Washington, D.C.; I trust the wisdom of the American people," was Bush's refrain in his revised early October stump speech. Sound familiar?

Democrats can be forgiven for coming down with a nasty case of déjà vu. But there's no reason they should make the same mistakes all over again. In fact, they are doing a better job of responding in this election than they did in 2000. That's partly because Bush's record in office and a slew of sensible Democratic policy positions give the party the opportunity to reclaim the high ground in the debate over giving citizens power and a say. After all, voters are waiting to hear someone from either party who speaks to their concerns, and Bush and his "ownership agenda" are not it. First, Bush's ideas are the warmed-over reruns of what he offered in 2000—and then largely failed to act on.

Second, as many, including Jonathan Chait in these pages ("Up and Away," September 13 & 20), have shown, there are problems with the ideas themselves. Social Security privatization, in the Bush proposal, would be enormously expensive, costing more than $1 trillion to transition to the new system without hurting present retirees. Given Bush's record deficits, this is not in the cards. Health Savings Accounts might discourage people from seeking preventive care when preventive care is what we should be promoting.

Third, Bush is in no position to run as a believer in giving "the little guy" a bigger voice and more power. In office, he has proved to be a solicitous friend of big, impersonal bureaucracies—as long as they are of the corporate variety. By consistently opposing reforms that would give Americans more information about and more control over decisions made by their health plans or their mutual funds, he has shown that his vaunted "trust" in the American people is far from complete.

Clearly, the Republican ownership ideas are ripe for criticism. But, if all Democrats did was criticize, they would not only be making a tactical mistake, they would also be passing up a great strategic opportunity to put forward their own agenda. Bush's plan, as misguided as it may be, is responding to a real longing for more choice and decision-making power. Democrats cannot allow him to own this field. In fact, it is territory that should be theirs.

Fortunately, in this campaign, we have seen the first glimmers of what a Democratic response could be. In his third and final debate with Bush, for instance, Kerry pitched his health care plan as not only a way to hold down skyrocketing costs or expand coverage, but also as a way to give Americans more power and more options. He used some variation of the word "choice" 13 times in the debate's health care discussions, spending more time on that concept than on tried-and-true needs, such as covering the uninsured or holding down premium hikes.

Much of the reason for this was defensive. It was Kerry's response to Bush's charges that he favored a Clintonesque system of government health care. But there is no need for Democrats to use ideas about expanding choice and decision-making power for citizens only to parry Republican attacks. In the months and years ahead, these concepts should serve as a central thrust of the party's agenda—in office and out, at the federal, state, and local levels. Democrats can trump Bush's "ownership society" with a vow to bring a "choice revolution" to government as bold and far-reaching as the progressive revolution that spawned Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Lyndon Johnson.

HOW WOULD THIS Democratic "choice revolution" work? First, while Republican plans often offer choice for the few (the very wealthy in the case of Health Savings Accounts or the very poor in the case of school vouchers), Democrats can offer choice for all—especially the middle class. For instance, they can trump school vouchers for a small number of students by introducing more choices than the Republicans for *all* students in public schools. And Kerry's Tempe debate answers demonstrate how Democrats can pledge to provide Americans with more say when it comes to their health care by giving them, rather than bureaucrats at the Department of Health and Human Services or in HMOs, the power to make decisions like choosing their doctors.

Second, the Republicans' ideological blinders prevent them from doing something the Democrats can: seeing the possibility of choice without undermining the New Deal–Great Society legacy of a strong safety net. Democrats can offer Americans personal control without ripping apart their basic security. So, while Republicans want to privatize Social Security more out of an antipathy toward the program than an actual desire to increase choice, Democrats can offer retirement savings accounts that offer personal control without risking Social Security.

In 2002, for example, former President Bill Clinton put forward an idea to "give people one or two percent of the payroll tax with the same options that federal employees have with their retirement accounts—where you have three mutual funds that almost always perform as well or better than the market and a fourth option to buy government bonds, so you get the guaranteed Social Security return and one hundred percent safety, just like you have with Social Security." It was met with silence by Democratic leaders.

Yet it is a debate Democrats need to be having. According to a Federal Reserve study, the percentage of American

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households owning stock rose from 19 percent in 1983 to 52 percent in 2001. This occurred during both bull and bear markets, and the increase in stock ownership has continued long after the tech bubble so famously burst. This has been, of course, fed by a desire for wealth, but there has been more to it than that—a desire for more control. NEW REPUBLIC founder Walter Lippmann wrote 90 years ago, "The great mass of people who saved a little money can no more deal with their prosperity on their own initiative than they can deal with disease or war on their own initiative." Americans no longer feel so helpless.

This is why the Bush Social Security privatization proposal is, on its face, so popular. In an October 2003 CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* poll, Americans were asked their opinion of allowing "people to put a portion of their Social Security payroll taxes into personal retirement accounts that would be invested in private stocks and bonds." Sixty-two percent of Americans favored this idea, while 34 percent opposed it—even though this question was asked after one of the worst stock market declines in American history.

Declining Dow Jones averages had little impact on this desire—neither did pollsters' mention of the Enron debacle and the market's riskiness. But that should not be too surprising. In a July 2002 Zogby poll, only 16 percent of respondents said the reason they supported individual accounts was that "higher retirement benefits would result from private investment." The top answer? Thirty-nine percent said, "I, not the politicians in Washington, could control the money in my account."

If stock losses and corporate shenanigans could not shake American's desire to carve out parts of Social Security into individual accounts, what could? An alternative. In 2000, Gore proposed using parts of the then-surplus to create individual tax-deductible retirement accounts outside of the Social Security system that offered personal control without eliminating the safety net. When pollsters asked Americans their preference between this plan and privatization, the Gore proposal won by big margins—every time.

Democrats—the "party of the people," as they call themselves—should be at the forefront of looking for ways to give people more of a say in their own future and retirement, not just criticizing the other side. It is in line with the party's traditions—and has the added benefit of being politically essential.

Third, it is no accident that the Republicans have sold their agenda under the word "ownership"; it defines their view of the issue: carving out responsibility from government and placing it in the hands of individuals. Democrats do not need to travel down that road in order to give Americans more choice. Instead of privatization, they can offer personalization—reforming the already universal public-sector structures so that they respond to the public's wide diversity of needs and wants—for example, replacing one-size-fits-all public schools with classroom settings better geared to each student's own way of learning.

Finally, there is a big difference between an abstract liberty to choose and an actual ability to do so. It is one thing for Republicans to curtail government's reach and throw people back upon themselves in the market. It is another to use government activism in a way that is bigger and broader than ever tried before: to work toward a vision where it is no longer only the most fortunate in our country who get to make basic choices, such as what kind of schools their children attend or which doctor their family sees.

DEMOCRATS, OFTEN DEFENSIVE about using government, are loath to do this, but the result is a mealy-mouthed message and broad confusion about what, if anything, the party stands for. The fact is, most Americans don't have antipathy toward government—they are apathetic. Government seems like an outdated institution that is out of touch with their lives. Democrats who do not seem to understand this have been losing election after election.

Instead, this "choice revolution" not only offers a way to meet the Republican "ownership society," it is also a way for the party to find its voice again: reaching out to liberals by pushing the boundaries of government activism on behalf of equality and diversity, responding to middle-class voters who want more say and control over their lives and their family decisions, and speaking to a broad populist pique spreading across a voting public fed up with elitist, arrogant, antiquated bureaucracies in both big business and big government—and bothered that each party only gets it half right.

Democrats routinely score better among the public on domestic issues such as health care and schools. But, given a choice between a "smaller government with fewer services" and a "larger government with more services," a majority of Americans choose the former. That was true in 2000; it is true today. Nevertheless, too often Democrats give little to no indication that they have any conception of this popular dissatisfaction with government as usual.

Yet, neither do Democrats need to become crypto-conservatives. Bush's convention speech demonstrated that—to his credit—he understands that this famed polling question is the type of false choice that drives Americans up the wall and out of the political debate. The fact is that, for more than a decade, something very clear has come through about Americans' views: They want a government that is smaller, decentralized, less bureaucratic—and more active than ever before. This finding is a source of perpetual mirth for some in Washington, who cannot help but chortle at the apparent contradiction. It turns out the joke's on them.

This desire for the public sector is completely in line with what Americans have come to expect from the best of today's private sector. On the job and at home, they have more information, more personalized service, and more individual decision-making power than ever before. The race to build a new governing majority is the rush to give Americans more choice and a stronger voice. Democrats are lagging behind—but the path for them is there for the taking. ■

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Hot Button Issues

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Fire and Ice

THROUGH THE FIRST TWO thousand years of European theater, every play was performed by an all-male cast. Popular entertainments of various sorts were another matter. Women were not permitted to act in the (let's call them) legitimate theaters of Europe until the sixteenth century, in Italy and France and Spain—then a century later in Britain. All female roles had been played by boys and young men. Some dramatists in those earlier days included comments on these conditions in their work. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, anticipating inevitable theater performances of her story, says, "I shall see/Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness." Consider that the word "boy" is here a verb and that the queen is deploring the idea of a male playing her: then remember that, in the first production, this line was spoken by a young man in female dress. It's dizzying.

STAGE BEAUTY
(Lions Gate)

VODKA LEMON
(New Yorker)

The gender bar in the English theater was lifted when Charles II returned to Britain in 1660 after the country's eleven years of Puritan rule. Theaters had been closed under Cromwell. Charles and his court had spent their exile in France and came back tempered by the experience. Theaters were re-opened, and, as in France, women could now act. But the abolition of the gender bar raised a problem. The employment of women brought a crisis to males who had been playing female roles. What were they to do? An American playwright named Jeffrey Hatcher has addressed the subject, then adapted his play for the screen, and here it is—**STAGE BEAUTY.**

For his protagonist Hatcher chose Ned Kynaston, a noted performer of women's roles in the early Restoration days, and Kynaston is played by Billy Crudup. This is the sort of event that, after it has happened, we feel that we foresaw. Actor and role seem a predestined union. Crudup is a phenomenon who is only beginning to get the sort of recognition he deserves. Clearly he has always been an unusual actor, fine-featured, fascinatingly versatile, but few thought that he would make it into the front rank of stars. Gradually we are seeing that this is exactly what Crudup is aiming at: he wants to be relied on for acting, not for the merchandising of charisma. This is a peculiar choice these days, but Crudup is making it stick. In films he has played, among others, a rock musician, a drug addict, an Olympic athlete; in the New York theater he has done Chekhov and Stoppard, and he gave an accomplished performance as Oedipus in a new play on the subject. Now here he is, clad in Restoration dresses, made up, wigged, flouncy, as a man whose profession is playing women. To Crudup, ladies and gentlemen who still care about acting, attention must be paid.

The film begins with Kynaston at the top of his profession, praised for his Desdemona and Ophelia and other female roles. King Charles, a devoted theatergoer, is one of his admirers, as is Samuel Pepys, who wrote about him. Elegant ladies like to take Kynaston about in their carriages in his female array. Then the custom shifts: the theater employs women, and Kynaston is stranded. He has trained for years to play women, and now he is professionally bereft. When it is suggested that he play men, he protests that men are not beautiful and do nothing beautiful. But his adoring dresser, Maria, played by Claire Danes, helps to persuade him to move into male roles.

One persuasion is sexual. Kynaston's stage sexuality had spilled into his life: he has been willing, if not more than, to play a woman in bed. Maria, who herself has acting plans, refocuses him sexually—and, as a result, artistically. In the film's last sequence we see Kynaston as a raging Othello and Maria as a willowy Desdemona in the strangling scene, and their success in their roles restarts both their lives.

If *Stage Beauty* is in sum less moving than interesting, it certainly sustains that interest—with warm lamp-lit interiors and swirling costumes and good acting. It was directed by Richard Eyre, eminent in the English theater and experienced in film. (The lovely *Iris*, about Iris Murdoch, was his.) Eyre has directed this new picture fluently, even literally so: the camera glides a great deal. Stylistically, as he certainly knows, the strangling scene is a liberty. The two actors play that scene, in order to impress the king, with a realism that is two centuries ahead of its time, which anachronism Eyre apparently thought was necessary for today's audience. Another liberty is the presence of Nell Gwyn as the king's mistress. She did indeed become his mistress, but in 1660 she was ten years old.

Rupert Everett plays King Charles with such pleasure in his foppery that it would be mean to deny him any of it. Danes has charm and pathos in her devotion to Kynaston. Crudup is whole. He creates the man who has pride in what he does, who is suddenly stripped of the work and the pride; and who makes his way, somewhat painfully, to another sort of pride. His story is a small but acute poignancy in the history of the theater, and Crudup realizes it completely.

But why didn't they add a note at the end? Kynaston went on from that glimpse of his Othello to a long and successful career in leading male roles. That fact makes his life even more remarkable.

VODKA LEMON is an Armenian film set in the wide and wintry mountains of that region. The snow is so vast, the landscape so bleak, the housing so minimal, that the story seems to be taking place inside an immense refrigerator. The director, Hineer Saleem, is a Kurd from this area who wanted to convey the extraordinary

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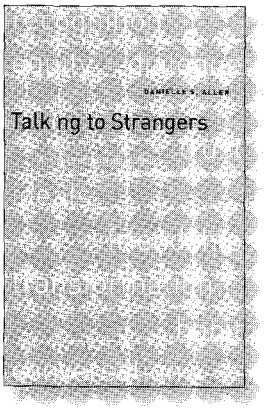

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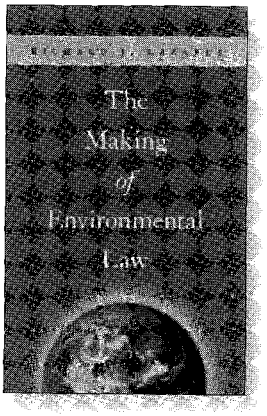

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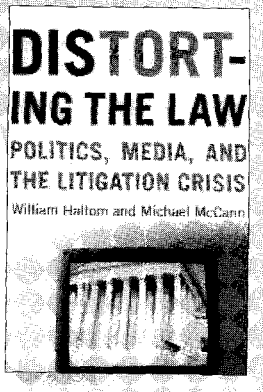

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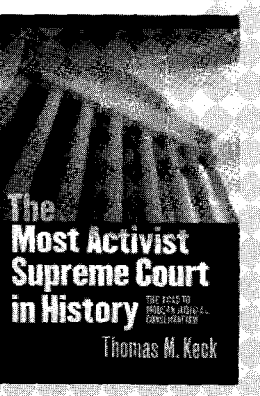

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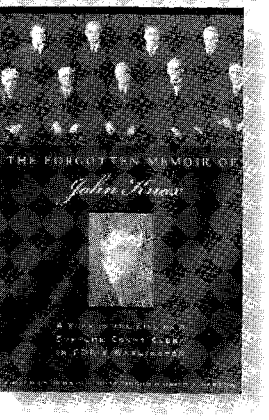

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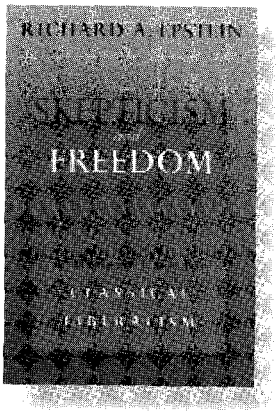

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tenacity of the relatively few people who live there. And Saleem presents matter in a mode that, though presumably veristic, has suggestions of comedy.

For instance, a roadside shop bears the sign—in English—Vodka Lemon and sells nothing but. This stand is on a narrow road that stretches out of sight in both directions with almost no traffic. A purchaser complains that the vodka tastes of almonds, not lemon, and the saleswoman says, "That's Armenia." Perhaps it is also Armenia to put a stand on a virtually deserted road. When a man wants to sell a wardrobe, he lugs it out to the same road. The same thing happens with him and a friend and her piano. In this frigid weather people very rarely wear gloves. A horseman rides through the picture once in a while, unexplained, unremarked. Are all these things Armenia?

Such story as there is, outside the doings of everyday life, centers on a middle-aged widower and a middle-aged widow and their eventual alliance. But as the picture winds on, the feeling grows that Saleem, who clearly knows these people, wants to show that their mode of life in this stark setting has, in a gentle way, a touch of the ridiculous. ■

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

In the Jungle

LAST YEAR, BARBARA GAINES, artistic director of the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, invited Edward Hall to re-stage his marathon Shakespeare cycle, **ROSE RAGE**, with her young company. The production has now opened in New York at the Duke on 42nd Street, where it proves a perfect union of director, actors, concept, and location. I say location because the entire action of this four-hour conflation of the three parts of *Henry VI* (five and a half hours if you include the dinner break) is set in an abattoir, and Chicago has a well-documented history of unsavory stockyards. (Upton Sinclair famously fastened the nation's attention on those slaughterhouses in *The Jungle*, then Bertolt Brecht satirized the ruthlessness of greedy Chicago meatpackers in *St. Joan of the Stockyards*.) The fact that Hall's production was first performed in England with an entirely English cast is an accident of geography. He may very well have been thinking of Chicago when he conceived it, if not of the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, because the juicy parts that he carves out of this bloody carcass seem processed especially for this prime company. (A metaphor like that disqualifies me from complaining about the awkward pun in Hall's title.)

ROSE RAGE
(Duke Theater)

HEDDA GABLER
(New York Theatre Workshop)

In *Rose Rage*, the slaughterhouse becomes an image for the inhumanity of man to man, and war becomes an extension of butchery by other means. The metallic set, fitted together with numbered metal lockers, is an environment where Victorian butchers, attired in white smocks and masks, are devoted to pounding the inner organs of cows and sheep. Admittedly, this grisly device sometimes runs a little thin—or shall we say a little thick. To watch this chorus of meatpackers sharpening their long knives, then hacking away at dozens of bloody animal hearts, livers, spleens, and intestines every time some poor shlub gets punctured on the battlefield, is enough to convert you to a diet of broccoli and brussels sprouts. (For the sake of variety, human heads are represented by purple cabbages, sliced on tables or skewered on spikes, and one nobleman is even hung from a meat hook.)

But the image of the slaughterhouse is highly effective as a gory metaphor of carnage and warfare. Edward Hall's father, Peter Hall, directed a similar reduction of those plays called *The Wars of the Roses* with the Royal Shakespeare Company more than forty years ago. Unlike George W. Bush, the younger Hall outdoes his parent in managing these wars, locating a comprehensible thread of narrative in the tangled skein of competing interests for the throne. His adaptation, written with Roger Warren, omits the Joan la Pucelle plot, in which a xenophobic Shakespeare treats the maid of Orleans as no better than a witch with an itch—a "foul fiend of France" consorting with "lustful paramours." I missed the impassioned capers of this wild virago, but her absence helped clarify the plot line.

As written, the three parts of Henry VI are largely a long string of arguments between a group of relatively undifferentiated and faceless characters ("historical cartoons," in the words of Harold Bloom, "declaiming heroic bombast"). Their basic issue is who has the greater right to the English throne, which virtually everybody claims. Henry V having died, England is in a state of near anarchy. The crown has passed to his ineffectual son, the child Henry VI, who becomes the pawn of competing factions of nobles. The houses of York and Lancaster go to war with each other, at the same time trying to prevent uprisings in Ireland and the loss of English holdings in France, and providing the opportunity for a great deal of fustian belligerence.

Although scholars regard the plays largely as a laboratory in which Shakespeare perfected his craft, the engaging thing about the Hall production is how clear the storytelling has become, with the aid of clean, brisk, edgy performances by the actors. In the fashion of current English practice, *Rose Rage* is an all-male production—though, with only three women in the adapted text, this cut version of *Henry VI* is practically all men anyway. The Frenchwoman Margaret, whom Suffolk takes as his mistress before marrying her off to the innocent King Henry, is played by the young Chicago actor Scott Parkinson in a cunning female impersonation. Shakespeare uses animal imagery to describe this feral queen—"the she-wolf of France," "a tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide." (Borrowing this metaphor, the envious Robert Greene described Shakespeare as "a tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide.") Parkinson plays Margaret as a virulent, lipsticked predator in a perfumed boa, callous, relentless, ruthless, with no tenderness for anyone but her illegitimate child.

I said that the characters in this trilogy were undifferentiated, but each play has at least one exception. In Part I, it is Joan la Pucelle. In Part II, it is Jack Cade, a populist pretender among an army of claimants to the crown. He and his proletarian army enter chanting reformation hip-hop ("Down with the

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government, down with the gentry"), banging drums and smashing bats on the metallic floor in rhythm with their raucous shouts. As written by Shakespeare and as played by the dynamic Joe Forbrich, who turns this truculent anti-elitist into a Midwestern blue-collar ruffian, Cade bears an uncanny resemblance to a French Jacobin, spewing hatred for the educated ("Thou hast traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm by erecting a grammar school") and the skilled ("The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers"). Like Harpo Marx tearing a book to pieces in *Animal Crackers*, he gets angry because he can't read. He sends a justice to the gallows simply for speaking Latin. People who speak French he calls traitors (anticipating the Republican spin on John Kerry). Inevitably, Cade, like his eighteenth-century descendant Robespierre, gets his own head cut off, as the leaves of one more cabbage scatter in the dust.

Part III features the emergence of the most fascinating character in the play—Shakespeare's first well-written villain, Richard Crookback. This hedgehog, born with a full set of teeth, is a man destined "to bite the world." As played by Jay Whittaker, he not only brandishes a straight razor, he *is* a straight razor—you can cut yourself simply by touching him. Anticipating his intent to murder Edward's two sons in the tower, he licks the kids' faces with his viperish tongue. Glowering, sneering, a tuft of beard beneath his lower lip, a rakish black homburg on his head, Whittaker is as blistering and cruel and witty a Richard as I've ever seen—and I've seen a lot of good ones, including Olivier, McKellen, and Branagh.

Carmen Lacivita emphasizes the Christ-like qualities of young King Henry as he evolves from innocent boy into remorseful witness of the evil he has unwittingly created ("Pardon me, God," he says before he dies, "for I know not what I did"). No doubt prompted by this paraphrase of the Passion, the director suspends him from iron rings at the moment of his demise. Although she is indifferent to the fate of her husband, Queen Margaret wants to die, too, having witnessed the murder of her son. The butchers sharpen their knives. But "misshapen Dick" spares her to become one of the three wailing women in *Richard III*.

To single out individual actors from the production is to disregard the general excellence of this remarkable company. The Chicago Shakespeare Theater has been in existence now for eighteen years, and I am ashamed to say that until *Rose Rage* I had never seen it in performance. If this production is typical of the company's work, then it is clearly one of the most talented, electric, and dynamic theaters in the country. Don't worry about the length of the evening. You won't regret a bloody minute of it.

The innovative Dutch director Ivo van Hove has returned to the New York Theatre Workshop with a new production—Ibsen's **HEDDA GABLER** in Christopher Hampton's terse adaptation. Van Hove's previous work here included controversial deconstructions of Williams's *Streetcar Named Desire*, O'Neill's *More Stately Mansions*, and Susan Sontag's *Alice in Bed*. The current production does not quite match those other works in power or originality. But nothing this director creates is ever less than engrossing, and even when it disappoints, this *Hedda* delivers some riveting performances.

Jan Versweyveld's set is an unfinished room covered in drywall that extends along the sides of the entire theater. Built into one of these walls are three metal panels marked "kitchen," "attic," and "coat room," where the maid stows suitcases and outerwear and refrigerated items. Flowers in pots and paint cans are scattered on the floor. When the audience enters the house, a woman in a bathrobe is sitting at a piano, her fingers roaming idly over the keys. The piano is the major prop on stage, and Hedda Gabler (Elizabeth Marvel) seems as drawn to it as Blanche DuBois (also played by Marvel) was to the bathtub in van Hove's production of *Streetcar*.

Marvel's neurasthenic Hedda is obviously in an advanced state of edgy depression from her first moment on stage. She shrieks at her servant, Berte (the mournful Elzbieta Czyzewska), but then so does everybody else. Van Hove's treatment of this minor character is typical of the way he re-imagines each of the others. Sitting in a chair near a surveillance screen, announcing visitors, smoking cigarettes, and absorbing insults, Berte is a victim of serious servant abuse. As for the conventional Aunt Julia (Mary Beth Peil), she is now an elegant Park Avenue matron with a tart tongue. The long-suffering Thea Elvsted (Ana Reeder) has become a spirited flapper who gives as well as she gets. The timid academic George Tesman (Jason Butler Harner) is re-characterized as something of a spoiled brat, while Eilert Lovborg (Glenn Fitzgerald) is more dyspeptic than Dionysian. As for the wily, magisterial Judge Brack (John Douglas Thompson), he comes off like an insinuating, whimsical, horny, and ultimately sadistic version of Sportin' Life.

In each case, van Hove takes some latent quality in a character and makes it dominant. This is particularly true of Hedda. The desperation that leads to her suicide at the end is perfectly clear at the beginning. Wearing a scanty pink shift throughout most of the play, she displays no desire to get dressed or to leave the house or even to put on a pair of panties. She is by turns bored, frantic, flirtatious, subject to childish tantrums. She receives everyone in the same state of irritated rage that she shows toward her servant. She exposes her legs to Judge Brack. She throws her shoes at Lovborg (he shies a few books back at her). She turns violent with Thea, pulling her hair. Everyone in the play displays a degree of temperament. Marvel raises temperament to the level of pathological breakdown.

Van Hove's usual method is to provide an X-ray of a play that exposes its fractured bones. In *Hedda*, his radiographs are cloudy, and more than a few of his interpolations are clumsy or perverse. The house Tesman has bought is

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described as marvelous and luxurious. This dump is so unfinished that Hedda has no hesitation hurling flowerpots and stapling geraniums to the drywall. The constant tinkling of the piano grows annoying. When Hedda burns Lovborg's manuscript, she first has to uncover a gas grill on the floor and then ignite it. And it is a serious omission that no portrait of General Gabler hangs in this house. Hedda's father is a crucial if invisible character in the play, the martial image of masculinity and confidence against which the daughter measures all other men (and finds them wanting).

But the final scene, when Brack returns to report Lovborg's death to Hedda, almost redeems the previous lapses. Earlier, Hedda had persuaded Lovborg to shoot himself in the head with one of her father's pistols, and thus restore her belief that heroic action can still survive in this domestic barnyard. Brack reveals that Lovborg has shot himself "somewhat lower," by accident, and in a house of prostitution. "Everything I touch turns into something ludicrous and disgusting," remarks Hedda. As if to illustrate this, Brack takes the can of vegetable juice that she has been drinking and pours it over her head and down her chest, then forces her face into the liquid that has spilled on the floor. It is a repellent act of subjugation and humiliation, recalling the way Stanley held Blanche's head underwater in the bathtub in van Hove's *Streetcar*. That act pushed Blanche into madness. This one drives Hedda to suicide, leaving her no alternative but to shoot herself with her father's remaining pistol. In her death throes, she wriggles across the back of the stage as Brack casually whispers, "My God, people don't do things like that."

It is an astonishing and daring scene, performed by two splendid actors—Marvel, who is indeed a marvel, reaffirming her place as one of the most powerful artists of her generation, and Thompson, already on his way to joining her in the pantheon. As for van Hove, he has made one of Ibsen's creakier plays into a compelling postmodern construction, with a fully recognizable contemporary neurotic at the center. He pays a price for this achievement in some loss of clarity. But he has exposed the donkey muzzles and swine snouts that Ibsen always perceived in the faces of his "dear domestic animals." ■

Ruth Franklin

Nobel Savage

Who is Elfriede Jelinek?

THE NOBEL PRIZES HAVE been fraught with controversy since their inception, but none more so than the prize in literature. The list of those passed over, which begins with Proust and Kafka and extends through Woolf, Joyce, and a truly remarkable number of luminaries of twentieth-century literature, is every bit as illustrious as the roster of winners. Indeed, the prize has become famous for the apparent caprice with which it is awarded. As Alan Riding observed in *The New York Times* on October 6, the day before this year's laureate was announced, "the Swedish Academy is so eccentric in its choice that the astonished winner often enjoys 15 minutes of fame and is quietly forgotten." But with the selection of Elfriede Jelinek, the Austrian writer whose novels of the 1980s are prooftexts of a particularly virulent sort of radical feminism, the academy has dealt the prize's reputation a blow from which it may not soon recover.

Jelinek's signature work is her novel *Die Klavierspielerin*—literally "the female pianist," translated into English as *The Piano Teacher*—which appeared in 1983. It depicts the torments of Erika Kohut, a woman who is able to relate to other people only sadomasochistically. She is trapped in an incestuous and stifling relationship with her mother, with whom she shares a cramped apartment, and over the course of the novel she becomes involved with one of her students, who is at first repulsed by her sexual proclivities but soon comes to revel in his domination over her. The book provoked a sensation not just for its subject matter and its graphic, indeed pornographic, imagery—in one of the more notorious scenes Erika mutilates her genitals with a razor—but also for Jelinek's acknowledgment that many of its elements were autobiographical. (Jelinek studied piano at conservatory and to this day lives with her mother.) The book is written in a terse, almost simplistic style, which by the novel's end becomes completely subsumed in obscenity. Jelinek defended her stylistic choices as a legitimate depiction in art of the innately violent power structures that govern the relations between men and women. As the Nobel Committee wrote in its statement, "Jelinek lets her social analysis swell to a fundamental criticism of civilization by describing sexual violence against women as the actual template for our culture."

Though a recent film of the novel garnered some critical acclaim, Jelinek's work was never intended to appeal to a mainstream audience. But in the years in which influential writers such as Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin, and Catharine MacKinnon espoused a similarly strident and uncompromising view of the position of women in society and its origins in the essentially violent character of male sexuality—which they regarded, one might say, as the actual template for our culture—Jelinek could find sympathetic readers in women's studies courses in Europe and the United States. By now many of her erstwhile intellectual compatriots have abandoned their singleminded critique of patriarchy for the analysis of other troubles in the world. (The German writer Christa Wolf, for instance, went through a Jelinek-like phase in the early 1980s with *Cassandra*, a feminist re-telling of the Trojan War, but since then she has made her main preoccupation the politics of East Germany before and after the Wall.) Jelinek, too, has turned her attention from sexual politics to world affairs, abandoning the novel form for a series of increasingly polemical plays; but she has merely transported her old obsession into new realms. She has stubbornly clung to her anachronistic and essentializing—and worse, erroneous—representation of women's relationships to men.

THE NOBEL COMMITTEE'S statement praises Jelinek as "a dauntless polemicist with a website always poised to com-

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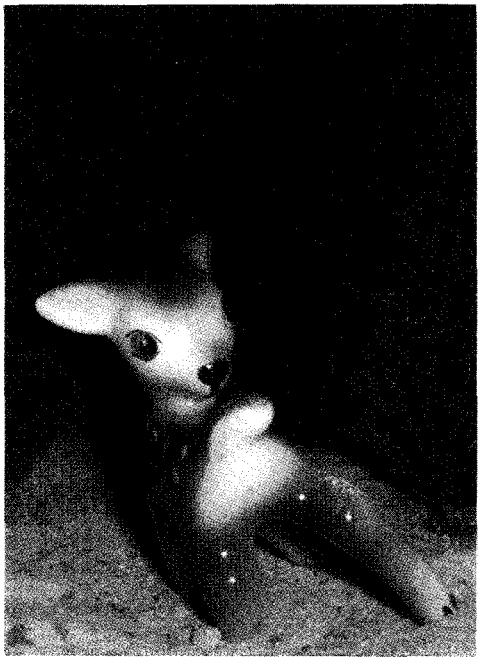
ment on burning issues." She is surely the first Nobel laureate in literature with her own home page; and a look at some of the "commentary" on this site reveals a disturbed mind. In a lecture delivered last spring at the Jewish Museum in Vienna, Jelinek used a book about the experiences of women in concentration camps as a springboard for a more general riff on women as victims of male society. Women, she stated, are designed to "be used and then thrown away, like a dirty, crumpled tissue." "Nature has provided woman with holes," Jelinek continued, "so that all can use her":

> The victor is masculine, and even when the conquered, too, is masculine, he will be debased in the worst sort of way; one will make him into a woman, into the feminine, the feminized; just think of the notorious torture photographs from Abu Ghraib, where masculine victims were used as women and were forced to use each other that way, while the role of the man was played by a woman, although naturally she had to give that role up, since she wasn't entitled to it; at the same time that Lynndie England was depicted in the photos as a dogwalker with a person as the dog, she was already pregnant by the jail's chief torturer.

Nothing that has occurred in the past two decades, in Jelinek's own experience or in the social and legal experience of Western societies, has tempered the crudity of this writer's vision and language, even if her Freudian references to women's "holes" are familiar enough to have lost their shock value. But what is truly appalling in a writer who congratulates herself for her own sexual enlightenment are the gender stereotypes to which she unremittingly subscribes, stereotypes that are too simplistic and ultimately too misguided to offer a meaningful point of regard on an outrage such as Abu Ghraib. To say that the prisoners were debased by being made to play the roles of women (presumably Jelinek means in simulating sex acts) ignores the homosexual element of the torture, which surely was a major component in the prisoners' humiliation. And even stranger is Jelinek's comment about England's pregnancy, which, she argues, put the soldier back in her proper place: she could "[play] the role of the man," but her own biology would inevitably catch up with her, resulting in her subjugation. Jelinek is trying to draw an ironic contrast between the images of England as "dogwalker" and as pregnant woman; but to be moved by it, one must agree with Jelinek that pregnancy equals repression—another of this writer's false and repugnant anachronisms.

The Nobel Committee, not surprisingly, seemed to recognize the value of distancing itself from Jelinek's recent political writing, particularly her play *Bambiland*, which deals with the war in Iraq and premiered in Vienna last winter. "When that play came out, this decision was, if not already made, then well under way," various newspapers have quoted Horace Engdahl, the Swedish Academy's secretary-general, as saying. His comment begs an important question. It is hardly unusual for Nobel laureates to be recognized years after publishing their best work. (Grass and Naipaul come to mind.) But what if a writer's current work is so appalling that it ought to disqualify her altogether?



Bambi, from Elfriede Jelinek's website

One can deduce that *Bambiland*, about which Jelinek states at the start that "it's not by me ... it's by the media," is about the war in Iraq, based on its references to an army "forcing its way ... through people hungering and thirsting through the menacing city full of people," Dick Cheney ("Mr. Chairman of the Board, lord of the fiddled books, lord of jobs for the boys"), and oil ("So where is all the oil now, unused? Burning. Burning"). Looking at the written text of the play, which appears in German and in a serviceable English translation on Jelinek's website, it is impossible to surmise how it might be staged, since there are no stage directions. The play also has no plot and no characters. Reviews of the original production indicate that the stream-of-conscious monologue was spoken in turns by various actors, one of whom was dressed as a harlequin, another draped in a fur coat. On the website, the text of the play is interspersed with images that include reproductions of Mesopotamian antiquities, photographs from the torture at Abu Ghraib, and pictures of missiles; some of these, it seems, were also incorporated into the scenery when *Bambiland* was staged. "Not much was comprehensible. Everyone spoke at the same time, music roared—not for nothing did the usher offer earplugs," the critic Gudrun Norbisrath reported.

Parts of *Bambiland* (the title refers to a line in the play that equates the Iraqi people with Bambi: "they all look at us doe eyed, the fruit vendor, the farmer with his shotgun ... Bambi is always the poor, the small, the dear, the pestered") appear to be narrated by an American soldier uncertain whether the war is just: his language is a pastiche of jingoism, video-game violence, and corrupt military and bureaucratic technospeak. "We've come to commit ourselves to the overthrow of these cities," this voice states at the play's beginning.

> Some approach us in civilian clothing waving white flags, they dare to do so, and then they shoot at us! ... It's not fair. It is not a fair war. It is an unfair war. At least it takes place between unequals, that's something for a start. ... Just offshore, they are arriving, hurriedly grouping, the great army, the Tomahawk bullies ... this Tomahawk! You won't believe it! Autonomous directional control system (start it up and then forget about it). Not to mention the satellite navigation system, too complicated, dynamically calibrated inertial navigation system, plus ground radar for terrain contour matching (TERCOM).... High precision (50% of the hits in a 2 sqm target window!) through combining

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several navigation and target recognition systems, and there it goes, honestly, and it even knows exactly where to! . . . In contrast to you who often misses the target there is only a slight danger here of being shot down due to a very small radar profile (Stealth) and the low flying altitude of 15-100m, we will hear later why this is a risk (high angle velocity, brief prewarning time), prompt delivery for under 100 items, if you need them immediately, price per item of the standard version (without warhead, yes, unfortunately without warhead, that costs extra, there's no way round it): $650,000. Larger orders on demand. If you don't like them we will take them back, unused of course.

One need hardly be an enthusiast for the American war in Iraq to recognize that this is banal anti-American propaganda.

When the play takes a turn toward religion, things get more confused. In an interview with Al Jazeera given around the time of *Bambiland*'s premiere, Jelinek puzzled her interlocutor with a bizarre theory of the motivations of suicide bombers: they "can't abide loneliness," she said, and so they want "to take as many of us as possible along" on their journey "through the air to the virgins." The play offers a view of Christianity that includes a peculiar messianic vision of President Bush:

> Jesus is less than the father. He is not equal to the father, just like Donald Rumsfeld and George W. Bush, and Richard Perle is gone, but he is still here, and he and a few others believe that Jesus is with them. . . . At this point, Jesus W. Bush still refuses to be called equal to God, but we will convince him sooner or later. He is the son of God, but all others can equally become sons of God, or at least they can wish for that. The Jews are so odd.

But since this is a play by Jelinek, the military and the religious strands ultimately fuse in a rant that combines her inimitable pornographic horror with incomprehensible pseudo-philosophical musings. In the end, she cannot resist the tired phallic implications of the weapons. The final portion of the monologue is delivered by a voice that might belong to the soldier, or to Bush, or possibly to God himself:

> I am speaking to you as your Lord. Listen to me! With this bunker-busting bomb I am taking the liberty of shelling the self-appointed lord of this people like a nut. I have an appointment decree from my father. . . . Soon we will have got him. Dead or alive. . . . As I've said before, now let me explain it, this GBU-28 is a conventional weapon, 2.5 t in weight and laser guided. . . . It has a penetrator weighing 2.2 t. Fine. This is how it was intended by me because this man will never be my friend. I suck and suck his dick but nothing is coming out that I could keep swallowing, bugger that. Perhaps nothing is bound to come out and, quite on the contrary, perhaps something should thrust. These bombs are really modified canon [*sic*] barrels and I keep sucking them, oh dear, it's getting hotter, it's getting harder, something as hard as this you've never had in your mouth, guys, filled with 300 kg of highly explosive Tritonal. Yes, I filled this hard, sweet muzzle with the matching GBU-27 LGB kit, that is a laser-guided retrofit set. . . . Get something in your sights, pull the trigger, that's it that's it that's it. But there must be something that remains. But what? I'm still brooding over it. One must imprint the character of being onto the becoming right from the beginning, then it will work. By then this will have become our power. . . . We know nothing, we experience nothing, we err, we start all over again, we deceive ourselves, we deceive others, and once deceived we are disappointed that we haven't won yet. But soon we will have won. . . . That's it. That's it. That's it. He's shot his load at last. I thought he would never come.

THESE ARE THE words of the world's new greatest writer. Jelinek herself may offer the best commentary on her play in a manifesto for her theatrical writing: "I don't want theater," she wrote. "Perhaps I just want to exhibit activities which one can perform as a presentation of something, but without any higher meaning. . . . A fashion show, because on that occasion one could also send out the clothes by themselves. Get rid of human beings who could fabricate a systematic relationship to some invented character!" Her manifesto was called "I Want to Be Shallow." But shallowness is the least of *Bambiland*'s problems. When Jörg Haider's Freedom Party came to power in 2000, Jelinek responded by refusing to allow her plays to be performed as long as Haider occupied a government position. Her gesture was commendable, but relief is the only possible response.

Writing in *Der Spiegel*, Marcel Reich-Ranicki deemed Jelinek's novels "more or less banal" but professed his admiration for "her courage, her radicalism, her determination, her fury." Such attributes, while certainly admirable, are hardly a promise of literary greatness. What recommends Jelinek to her fans, it seems, is her politics, and her advertisement of herself as some kind of dissident. Thankfully, the advertisement has as yet been relatively ineffective. Normally the Nobel Prize announcement is followed by the frantic rushing of the writer's languishing work back into print, but at the Frankfurt Book Fair, in full swing at the time of the announcement, there was surprisingly little interest in the rights to Jelinek's books. (She is currently published in English by Serpent's Tail Press in England.) This year's Nobel Prize may be the rare case in which a writer is quietly forgotten before her fifteen minutes have even begun. ■

Pyromancy

Because I have mistaken my
life: sparks tend to fly under attic eaves.
Free oxygen ignites.

Because I would rather bear
buckets of water. Because our daughter
burns so beautifully

her adolescence into ashes.
Flambeau, whichever way she flows
she draws all eyes.

Because of a certain sameness
to disaster. Newborn we too began,
a handful of tinder.

Although our ladders clang
along her roof. Muttering, asleep, she
speaks arson's tongue.

Girl gone up like a match
struck, all December scrying hearthfire
we glimpse flowers.

ELLEN WEHLE

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Jerome Groopman

Forward, Medicine!

Science, morality, and embryonic stem cells.

THE PROTEUS EFFECT: STEM CELLS AND THEIR PROMISE FOR MEDICINE
By Ann B. Parson
(Joseph Henry Press, 301 pp., $24.95)

I.

IN 1979, AS PART OF MY TRAINING in hematology and oncology, I began working in a laboratory that was studying how blood is formed. The lab director, Dr. David Golde, wishing to impress on new trainees such as myself the profound importance of the research, began his orientation speech with a verse from Leviticus: "The life of the flesh is in the blood." Since ancient times, blood was seen as vital and, in a sense, sacred. But its origins were a mystery. By deciphering this mystery, scientists might in part unravel the mystery of life itself.

I had been attracted to the field of hematology in part by the aesthetic of blood. A simple prick of a finger causes a drop of blood to well, and when the drop falls onto a glass slide and is stained with a dye called Giemsa, a dazzling pattern, a whole universe, is revealed. To begin at the beginning: blood is classified in biology as a tissue, with two primary components, plasma and cells. The plasma part is liquid, and contains essential proteins and nutrients. The cellular component contains red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. Red cells carry oxygen, white cells defend us against infection, and platelets aggregate into a clot to prevent bleeding.

Under the microscope, blood cells are recognizable by their different sizes, shapes, and signature structures in the nucleus or cytoplasm. The red cells are oval, lack a nucleus, and have pale dimpled centers. They look like flattened doughnuts. Platelets also have no nucleus, but are smaller and more irregular than red cells, and have a bluish tinge; they resemble pieces of debris, and it seems remarkable that such tiny fragments can knit into the tear in a vessel wall and staunch a hemorrhage. White cells are many in type. Neutrophils have a craggy shape and a multi-lobed nucleus resembling a series of connected dumbbells. Monocytes are also irregular in contour, and their nucleus can resemble the braids of a challah. Both neutrophils and monocytes have the ability to recognize microbes that have invaded the body. When the invader is met, the cell's membrane enfolds around it and engulfs it. The neutrophil or the monocyte then unleashes a cache of powerful enzymes that destroys the germ.

Lymphocytes, another kind of white cell, usually display a more rounded contour. These cells come in two major types, B-lymphocytes and T-lymphocytes. They are also part of the immune system and are able to distinguish between self and foreign, between the host and external pathogens such as microbes. In the case of lymphocytes, however, recognition does not result in the invader's ingestion; instead, the moment of cellular awareness can spark a more lasting defense. B-lymphocytes produce antibodies, long-lived proteins that circulate in the plasma and coat microbes to make them more easily ingested meals for neutrophils and monocytes. T-lymphocytes have multiple functions, among them to serve as "memory cells" that remember the encounter with a particular germ; should the body again meet this microbe, the T-cell orchestrates a symphony of immune responses essential to self-preservation.

What I found most stunning was how this great diversity of specialized cells was constantly being rejuvenated. Red cells survive some one hundred twenty days, platelets about nine to eleven days, and neutrophils a mere six to eight hours. This means that the body needs a robust source constantly to replenish the many billions of cells that nourish us with oxygen, protect us from ambient pathogens, and prevent bleeding. How is this accomplished? No one had the entire answer.

BUT THE CENTRAL INSIGHT CAME from studies of mice conducted by Ernest McCulloch and James Till at the Ontario Cancer Institute in the late 1950s. McCulloch and Till were studying whether normal cells and tumor cells had different degrees of sensitivity to radiation. As part of their experiments, mice were given doses of radiation that obliterated their own blood cells, and then received infusions of normal marrow. The normal marrow cells repopulated the irradiated mice and rescued them. One day McCulloch was curious to see how quickly the infused marrow cells repopulated the mice, so he broke protocol and sacrificed some of the animals several days before they were to be routinely autopsied. The spleen is a site of blood production in the mouse in addition to the marrow, and McCulloch observed large whitish lumps studding this organ. With more analysis it became clear that each lump represented a colony of maturing blood cells derived from a single precursor cell. This precursor cell had the capacity to form all the different kinds of blood cells, and thus was termed a "totipotent stem cell." Till and McCulloch published their findings in 1960 and calculated that, in a mouse, about one in ten thousand bone-marrow cells qualified as a totipotent stem cell, capable of production of more totipotent stem cells or of mature red cells, white cells, and platelets.

In the adult mouse or man, primitive blood stem cells develop in the bone marrow; in the fetus, they are formed in the liver; and in the embryo, in the yolk sac. At birth, blood stem cells circulate in the umbilical vein. The laboratory I had joined was studying blood production from adult stem cells, so we had to obtain these precursor cells from the marrow cavity. Like the skull that encases the brain and the sternum that shields the heart, nature has devised a firm bulwark of bone to protect its precious blood stem cells. Marrow resides in the long bones of the arms and legs, and in the pelvis, spine, ribs, and sternum. To retrieve marrow, therefore, requires inflicting a wound. And that is precisely what the researchers did to one another in the laboratory for the sake of our stem-cell experiments.

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FOR THE NEWEST MEMBERS LIKE myself, it was something of an initiation rite. All of us had learned how to extract bone marrow from patients as part of our training, but none of us, I suspect, had ever had the procedure performed on ourselves. The marrow was obtained in a small room adjacent to the working laboratory. I lay flat on my stomach as a colleague used iodine solution to paint a large circle over the crest of my pelvis. "It hurts, a deep ache," he said, "each time we draw up the marrow. Women say it feels like a bad menstrual cramp." He injected lidocaine, a local anesthetic, into the skin and waited a few minutes for it to take effect. Following the line of the initial injection, he pushed a needle deeper to meet the surface of the bone. This area is rich in nerve fibers, and I jerked a bit from the burn of the anesthetic. "You are doing fine," he said. A few minutes elapsed to let the numbing drug take effect, and then I felt pressure as a large trocar with an internal stylet cut through the dermis and fat. The device met the bone and entered it. There was a moment of sharp pain. My colleague withdrew the stylet and attached a syringe to the top of the hollow trocar. He pulled the plunger up, creating a strong vacuum, and a deep visceral squeezing sensation permeated in my pelvis as the marrow surged up into the syringe. I broke into a sweat, but in less than a minute it was over.

I inspected what had been extracted. Marrow is a thick burgundy-colored slurry of cells, fat globules, and bony spicules. When the slurry was centrifuged, a thin band of cells separated from fat and bone. Within that band were cells distinguished by their blandness. These cells bore none of the beauty of their companions in the marrow—no azure granules, no braided nuclei, no craggy pseudopods. Instead they were small and round, a mere lip of cytoplasm surrounding a single compact nucleus. But within this monotonous sea of cells were the most primitive blood-forming cells—the stem cells that we were seeking.

We could not pick any one cell and say, "This is a stem cell." They are too rare, present at a frequency of one in ten thousand to one in a hundred thousand marrow cells, and they have no signature characteristics to be identified by sight. But we knew they were stem cells because we could track their footprints. Studies done since McCulloch and Till's discovery had revealed more about the behavior of marrow stem cells. For the most part, they are quiescent as if hibernating, but on occasion they will copy their own DNA, divide, and renew themselves as two stem cells. Or the stem cell might commit itself to a journey of differentiation. Culture conditions had been devised in the laboratory to cause stem cells to undergo this journey. Clusters of red cells or white cells appeared after some fourteen days. I recall viewing these clusters with awe. There was nascent blood emerging in a dish, concrete evidence of the power and polymorphous potential of stem cells.

IT WAS MORE THAN THE PURSUIT of knowledge for its own sake that motivated our laboratory, and scores of others around the world, to try to unravel the process of commitment whereby the primitive cell would relinquish its totipotent character and pursue a single occupation—carrying oxygen, combating microbes, preventing bleeding. We were also keen to learn how the marrow knew that once the duties of mature blood cells were discharged, and the cells senesced and died, they were to be replaced by new kin. Deciphering the intelligence of the totipotent blood-forming stem cell meant that we might control its decisions. We could instruct it to multiply, giving us a large pool of totipotent cells, or we could instruct it to mature, creating functioning blood. These objectives were most urgently demanded by fatal diseases such as leukemia and lymphoma, which were best treated by marrow transplantation.

That very severe treatment involved giving doses of chemotherapy and/or radiation that essentially obliterated not only all the blood cells in the circulation but also the regenerative stem cells. In this way, the person resembled the mice studied by Till and McCulloch: he lost the capacity to form new blood. The patient could be kept alive temporarily with transfusions of red blood cells and platelets, but there was no effective way to give white blood cells. Immunologically naked before bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites, he would develop a massive infection. And despite platelet transfusions, it could be difficult to prevent hemorrhage. Many died from sepsis or from bleeding. It was the stem cell that resurrected a patient undergoing marrow transplantation.

Elaborate laboratory facilities were built to conduct marrow transplants. Hospital rooms had laminar airflow, patients ate sterilized food, and caregivers worked in gown, gloves, and masks, all to limit exposure to ambient germs. It was a tense time of waiting for the stem cells, infused by vein into the patient, to home into their niches in the emptied marrow cavity and begin to self-renew and commit. The donor of the stem cells had to provide sufficient numbers of healthy stem cells for a successful graft. Sometimes this did not occur. The graft did not take. More stem cells or better stem cells were needed. But there was no way to obtain them. The patient died.

Over the ensuing twenty-five years, much has been learned about the marrow stem cell, and the fruits of that knowledge have been of great benefit to patients with cancer and blood diseases. The laboratory I was working in mostly contributed to an understanding of how white blood cells arise. Two proteins, called G-CSF and GM-CSF, act to direct the growth and the maturation of primitive precursor cells to spawn mature white cells capable of defending against infection. These proteins are now routinely used as therapeutics after chemotherapy or bone-marrow transplantation to truncate the perilous period when the immune system is depressed. Other laboratories worked on erythropoietin, the protein that directs precursor cells to yield red blood cells. It is widely used in the clinic not only for anemic patients with malignancy, but also for those whose anemia is related to kidney disease.

BUT THERE ARE STILL IMPORTANT unanswered questions about the blood-forming stem cell. We lack a full understanding of the control apparatus. We do not know how it renews itself, and we have only incomplete information about its decision-making processes as it chooses which path to follow. This means that there are still severe limitations in our ability to manipulate marrow stem cells for therapeutic purposes. In some patients, the cells can still be difficult to procure. Other patients have meager numbers of stem cells, and we do not have in hand methods to trigger them to reproduce robustly. Despite decades of trying, moreover, there are no techniques that allow for stem cells to be taken out of the body and perpetuated in the laboratory for long periods of time. There is no available source of continuously growing

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marrow stem cells. These issues make adult marrow stem cells not fully optimal as treatment for many fatal diseases.

What was learned about the genesis of blood now appears true for every other tissue of the body. Each tissue has its own stem cell. The diverse mature cells of the brain, which mediate movement, sensation, and thought; the cells of the pancreas, which produce hormones such as insulin or digestive enzymes that are necessary for our nutrition; the cells of the liver, which synthesize essential body proteins or process bile; and the components of the skin, which provide the covering integument, sweat glands, and hair: all these specialized cells grow from their own particular stem cells. Less is known about brain, liver, pancreatic, and skin stem cells compared with those in the marrow, but their behavior is, by definition, the same: a primitive cell that can self-renew or can differentiate into a mature functioning component of a specialized tissue. This broad biological truth about every tissue has seized the imagination of scientists across the globe. If coached properly, stem cells could replenish what is destroyed by disease and regenerate what withers with aging.

The most immediate aims of researchers are to restore insulin-producing cells to the pancreas in diabetics, and dopamine-producing neurons in patients with Parkinson's disease. But unlike blood, there is no ready source of tissue stem cells to work with. Stem cells from the pancreas and brain are extremely difficult to isolate and to manipulate. For that reason, scientists have asked whether a stem cell from one tissue, such as blood, might have the capacity to trans-differentiate, meaning to take a completely different path and switch identity to form an unrelated tissue such as pancreas or brain.

Trans-differentiation is one of the most controversial issues in biology today. Some laboratories have conducted experiments indicating that adult marrow stem cells might rarely integrate into tissues such as brain, heart, liver, skin, and skeletal muscle; trans-differentiate; and form its specialized cells. In these studies, the frequency of trans-differentiation is very small, meaning one in a thousand to one in a hundred thousand integrated marrow cells can turn into, say, a muscle fiber. Other research groups have failed to reproduce these experimental results, and argue that they are artifacts, and that it would be naïve to pursue trans-differentiation as a therapy for diseases of the brain, muscle, and so on. The jury is still out, but there is no disagreement among experts about the capacity of another type of stem cell to form any and all cells and tissues of the body. This is the embryonic stem cell. To some, it offers medicine's greatest promise. To others, it represents society's greatest peril.

II.

FIVE TO SIX DAYS AFTER AN EGG is fertilized by a sperm, a small ball of cells develops, called a blastocyst. This earliest form of the embryo, the size of a pinpoint, contains stem cells that can mature into every component of the body.

Embryonic stem cells that could be perpetuated ad infinitum in tissue culture were first derived from mice. Such continuous cultures of embryonic stem cells are termed "embryonic-stem-cell lines." For years, researchers tried and failed to create stem-cell lines from human embryos. Then, in 1998, James Thomson and his co-workers at the University of Wisconsin succeeded in establishing the first human embryonic-stem-cell lines. These lines were derived from embryos created for purposes of in vitro fertilization (IVF). In the course of IVF, numerous eggs are routinely fertilized and frozen in a viable state. After a successful pregnancy, or if the couple decides ultimately not to pursue pregnancy, the extra cryo-preserved embryos are discarded. Thomson took frozen embryos that were to be discarded and devised conditions that permitted the cells to grow continuously in the laboratory without losing their totipotent character. The culture conditions that Thomson and his group devised included using a scaffold of mouse cells to provide nutrition and support for the human embryonic stem cells.

In August 2001, President Bush announced what was termed a compromise on providing federal support for human embryonic-stem-cell research in the United States. Only embryonic-stem-cell lines created before August 2001, like those derived by Thompson at the University of Wisconsin, could be employed in federally funded experiments—and the vast majority of research in American universities is federally sponsored. The administration asserted that there were enough of these lines for research purposes in the laboratory and ultimately for therapeutic applications in patients. The number of lines cited by administration officials varied, but there were said to be as many as eighty.

In truth, there were far fewer extant embryonic-stem-cell lines—some twenty-two in all. Several had feeble characteristics, were growing poorly, and thus were of limited utility. Of equal importance, these approved lines were derived using Thompson's method of scaffolds of mouse cells, which presented safety concerns. (Mouse scaffold cells can contain latent viruses or toxic proteins that might be passed to the human embryonic cells. These infectious and proteinaceous contaminants would enter the pancreas of a child with diabetes or the brain of a patient with Parkinson's disease receiving a human embryonic-stem-cell trans-

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THE INTEGRATION OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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plant.) Since Bush's announcement, a number of scientific groups have developed human embryonic-stem-cell lines that robustly reproduce and are free from any rodent contamination. This work was either accomplished with private money or took place outside the United States. Under Bush's policy, these new embryonic stem cells cannot be shared with researchers who are funded in their work by the NIH or other federal agencies.

Several states are trying to skirt the federal restrictions on human embryonic-stem-cell research—most notably California, where the initiative known as Proposition 71 would invest $3 billion over the next decade in university and corporate laboratories. New Jersey and New York are also considering other types of legislation that would permit scientists to receive state funds for unfettered research.

The battle in California over Proposition 71 is a microcosm of the larger national debate. Some scientists, as well as patient advocates, have been too ready to promise immediate results in the amelioration of dreaded diseases that more sober experts believe will take many years to achieve. The distribution of state funds is vexed by the fact that researchers in a single state swim together in a relatively small pond. There is ample opportunity for conflict of interest, with scientists feeding each other grants that might not otherwise be given by a rigorous review process. And of course scientists outside California funded by NIH cannot use the research materials produced by their California colleagues. It would be vastly preferable to fund unfettered human embryonic-stem-cell research on a national level, and to have an established and relatively impartial body such as the NIH review research proposals and supply support. It would also permit what is now both commonplace and often vital to success in science: collaborations that cross state lines.

ANN B. PARSON HAS WRITTEN a timely and cogent account of the history of stem-cell research and the prospects for its future clinical applications. As Proteus could assume any form, so, too, does the totipotent stem cell: hence its enormous clinical promise. Most importantly, Parson highlights the complexities involved in the work and tempers the hype that stem-cell-generated cures are just around the corner:

> Despite their optimism, stem cell scientists acknowledge that some of the obstacles facing them are positively gargantuan. Consider a few of the difficulties associated with transplanting cells, a procedure that would first require growing embryonic stem cells, then converting them to a desired cell type, and finally delivering them to the right site in the body. Currently, the reported doubling time of human ES cells is twenty-four to forty-eight hours, depending on the cells; at that rate, say scientists, it could take a very long time to get the therapeutic amounts needed for a procedure. As for coaxing ES cells to become a specific cell type, this remains a difficult art, and so far it's hard to get quantities of almost any desired cell, according to scientists who are trying. Moreover, to what stage of differentiation should cells be grown? Which stage of maturation will be effective for therapy, which will be detrimental? Then there's the question of, when cells are injected, where exactly should they go in an organ? In respect to Parkinson's, for example, some researchers suggest one brain region, while others suggest another. Will enough of the delivered cells live? Will they stay in the right region or will they wander invasively into an area where they don't belong? Finally, if the cells are from a donor, can they be kept from causing a catastrophic immune reaction?
>
> One of the greatest fears is that transplanted cells can create a cancer. Embryonic stem cells are seen as riskier in this respect than older cells, because they are so proliferative. If put in the wrong place, they can lead to teratomas, and perhaps other types of tumors as well, warn scientists. If you're pouring millions of mature cells into the body, can you be certain there's no immature cell among them that will divide uncontrollably and form a malignancy? The endogenous approach—stimulating healthy, in-body cells to replace diseased cells—could be a cause for even greater concern, advises Michael Young. "If you're trying to induce a cell in the body to proliferate that shouldn't be proliferating, the potential to give rise to tumors might be a big problem," he speculates.
>
> A question that is especially hard for researchers to answer at this early stage, yet is so crucial, is, if you go to the trouble of substituting healthy cells for diseased cells, what guarantee is there that the new cells won't suffer the same fate as the old cells? "It probably depends on the context of the disease," says Melissa Carpenter, a stem cell biologist as the Robarts Research Institute in Ontario. "One of the standard answers is that in the case of, say, Parkinson's disease, it might have taken fifty or sixty years for those cells to die." Therefore, the replacement cells might be under no immediate danger.

Parson's concerns here are not theoretical. The approach of cellular replacement therapy for Parkinson's disease, for example, is haunted by past catastrophes using fetal cells. In these experiments, dopamine-producing nerve cells from fetuses were transplanted into degenerated parts of the cerebrum of Parkinson's patients. In some cases, the cells overgrew, resulting in widely uncontrolled movements of the limbs and face. It was not possible to extract the transplanted fetal cells without risking further damage to the brain. This was a sobering experience, and it vividly illustrated how difficult it can be to translate a single step forward in a laboratory into a leap at the bedside.

Still, important experiments are being done beyond the results compiled by Parson. This past August, a report was published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Titled "Derivation of Midbrain Dopamine Neurons From Human Embryonic Stem Cells," the article begins as follows:

> Human embryonic stem (hES) cells are defined by their extensive self-renewal capacity and their potential to differentiate into any cell type of the human body. The challenge in using hES cells for developmental biology and regenerative medicine has been to direct the wide differentiation potential toward the derivation of a specific cell fate.... To our knowledge, the selective derivation of any given neuron subtype has not yet been demonstrated. Here, we describe conditions to direct hES cells into neurons of midbrain dopaminergic identity.... The availability of unlimited numbers of midbrain [dopamine] neurons is a first step toward exploring the potential of hES cells

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in preclinical models of Parkinson's disease.

Despite the elegance of the reported science, the authors conclude their report with a series of reservations and warnings, focusing on how many more steps need to be taken before human embryonic stem cells could be a robust source of replacement neurons in the brains of people with Parkinson's disease. It is not at all clear that nerve cells produced in the laboratory will survive and continue to function as dopamine producers when transplanted into a patient's brain. As emphasized above, there are also serious safety concerns about using the federally supported human embryonic stem cells that are grown under conditions that utilize a supporting scaffold of mouse cells.

CURRENT LIMITATIONS ON HUman embryonic-stem-cell research affect much more than the creation of therapies. For stem-cell research also opens up entirely novel ways to understand the very basis of human disease. George Q. Daley, one of the rising stars in stem-cell biology, recently pointed out in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, in an article titled "Missed Opportunities in Embryonic Stem-Cell Research," that since President Bush announced the moratorium on creating embryonic-stem-cell lines with federal dollars, some 128 new types of such cell lines have been produced worldwide. Some of these new human stem-cell lines are untainted by serum or mouse-scaffolding cells, and thus safer for clinical applications than the federally sanctioned cells.

But Daley emphasized that it is not only stem-cell lines derived from healthy embryos that are lacking. The Reproductive Genetics Institute of Chicago has derived at least ten novel stem-cell lines from embryos carrying hereditary diseases. By studying such aberrant stem-cell lines, scientists have a unique chance to unravel the underlying dynamics of myotonic dystrophy, a degenerative disorder of muscle; Fanconi's anemia, a severe blood disease; and Marfan's syndrome, a disorder of connective tissue that can result in death from rupture of the aorta. "Many opportunities are being missed," Daley observed. "In my laboratory, for example, we are eager to obtain the line carrying the gene defect responsible for Fanconi's anemia. With it, we could ... study the characteristic genetic and chromosomal instability of these cells, test methods for gene repair, and screen for drugs that ameliorate the abnormality. Such investigations would provide new insights ... and might lead to treatments. But the President's policy prohibits us from using our federal grants to pursue these avenues."

While most scientists engaged in stem-cell research look to Senator John Kerry to overturn the limitations imposed by Bush and allow support from the government for research involving any human embryonic-stem-cell line, Daley makes a point that is not commonly appreciated: "Although a boon to stem-cell research, a change of administration would not immediately clear the way for important areas of embryo research. An even more restrictive element of government policy prohibits the use of funds for 'the creation of a human embryo or embryos for research purposes; or ... research in which a human embryo or embryos are destroyed, discarded, or knowingly subjected to risk of injury or death.'" This is the so-called "Dickey amendment," named for Representative Jay Dickey, Republican of Arkansas, who proposed it in 1995 as a rider on the appropriations bill for the Department of Health and Human Services. It has been renewed every year since.

The majority of human embryos that are being sought for medical research are created during IVF and deemed not suitable for pregnancy; thus they are routinely discarded. But, Daley writes, in connection with the Dickey amendment, "federal funds may not be used to ascertain what went wrong. Such studies, beyond improving the efficacy of fertility treatments, offer promise for understanding many chromosomal and developmental disorders that originate in the early embryo." The Dickey amendment also prevents federally funded scientists from performing "somatic-cell nucleus transfer," whereby the nucleus from a cell of a patient is implanted into an egg to create a totipotent cell line.

Research on a wide array of maladies, from psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia to neurodegenerative diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), would be assisted if somatic-cell nuclear transfer were supported by NIH and other federal agencies. But it is not. It will be American scientists who are left behind—along with the children and adults, of course, who might ultimately be aided.

III.

THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL FOR Bioethics has produced several reports detailing the reasons for its opposition to federal support for less restrictive human embryonic-stem-cell research. There are, in essence, three arguments made in these documents. The first is that embryonic-stem-cell research is a slippery slope that will lead society into a moral abyss. The second is that the manipulation of early embryos for purposes of research and development of therapeutics ignores the innate humanness of these embryos. The third argument, which is mostly a whisper from the council but is in fact the major cause of much of the public debate, is rooted in religious dogma.

The slippery-slope argument applies, of course, to every scientific advance. References to literature are frequently made by council members to heighten concern about inadvertently skidding into catastrophe: Hawthorne, for example, famously imagined a scientist obsessed with perfect beauty who gives a cleansing but fatal potion to his wife in order to erase an innocuous birthmark. The trouble with these cautionary tales is that scientific researchers rarely resemble their caricatures in fiction. The scientists I know who are laboring on stem-cell research are intent on erasing deadly pediatric diseases and debilitating maladies such as ALS and Parkinson's. Skin blemishes are not on their research agenda. Nor is anyone trying to create Superman—so-called "human enhancement." There is a great gulf between fixing a genetic lesion in an embryo that would lead to the birth of a child with Fanconi's anemia or muscular dystrophy, and meddling in the DNA to try to produce a baby who will one day have perfect SATs or win an Olympic medal.

The slippery-slope argument is made also about the scenario of an industry for body parts. Poor women may be paid to donate their eggs for IVF, and then the embryonic stem cells will be subverted for less than salubrious purposes, such as a market for replacement organs to prevent aging among the rich. These fears

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about exploitation for "human enhancement" are legitimate, and they need to be discussed. But they are certainly not dispositive: they can be securely guarded against by means of legislation.

All of these dystopian anxieties put one in mind of the furious public debates that occurred when recombinant DNA technology was developed in the 1970s and when IVF with "test-tube babies" succeeded in 1978. Decades later, the nightmare arguments about the slippery slope (then they came from the left) have proved to be wrong. The moratorium on recombinant DNA work sponsored by the far left was in force for nearly a year in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and it did nothing more than cause some scientists to migrate to California and others to be retarded in their work. Instead of Frankenstein or an Andromeda strain, recombinant DNA technology has yielded a plethora of desperately needed therapies, including human insulin, the blood cell growth factors erythropoietin and CSF used in cancer therapy and bone marrow transplantation, and cytokine inhibitors for rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease. The lives of hundreds of thousands of patients have been made immeasurably better by the application of cloning genes.

Slippery-slope arguments shut down serious thought. They are essentially appeals to fear. No monsters and no plagues have been unleashed by the cloning of genes. Similarly, hundreds of thousands of children conceived by IVF now fill families that were previously empty. And there are no IVF factories for body parts. Fringe scientists who share the fantasies of Mary Shelley or Michael Crichton are vigorously condemned in the scientific community, and they could be criminally prosecuted with the right legislation. Fences could readily be constructed by Congress around such awful prospects, as they have been in the United Kingdom, Israel, South Korea, and Singapore. All these states have outlawed so-called "reproductive cloning," meaning producing a human being or body parts from a manipulated embryonic stem cell. All permit work with IVF discards to create new treatments for incurable diseases.

THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL largely avoided invoking theology as the primary rationale for limiting stem-cell research. This is unfortunate, because it is theology that is the real motive behind most of the political opposition to embryonic-stem-cell research. But not all theology: the various monotheistic traditions do not have the same analysis of conception and the origins of life. The Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches firmly reject embryo research because it amounts to murder. The soul, they believe, enters the body at the moment of conception; their opposition is in concert with their stance on abortion. But several other traditions, including Judaism, Islam, and liberal branches of Protestantism, do not posit that human life occurs at such an early stage.

The exegesis of verses from Genesis and the Prophets has led to different religious opinions. Because God breathed into a lump of earth to form Adam, Judaism and Islam generally view life arriving when organs such as the lungs appear, many weeks after conception. The Talmud states that before forty days what is in the uterus is akin to water. Jewish thinkers point out, moreover, that the potential for life is not the same as life itself. Since IVF occurs outside the uterus, rabbinical opinion holds that it is permitted, and that the excess fertilized eggs can be discarded without moral qualms. Catholic and evangelical Protestant thinkers, by contrast, draw their conclusion that life begins at the moment the egg and sperm fuse, extrapolating in part from the verse in the beginning of Jeremiah where God says, "I knew you before you were formed in the womb."

The important fact is that this is all theology. From a scientific point of view, no one can know when ensoulment occurs, or if it occurs. It is a metaphysical question that cannot be empirically answered. In this matter, no data can be sought from experimentation. And so aspects of our humanness are considered by scientists as surrogates for the soul, most notably whether the embryo is sentient at such an early stage—that is, whether it has sufficient neural development to perceive pain or to react to noxious stimuli. And the empirical truth is that it does not do so at day five or six, when stem cells are taken from the blastocyst.

Some moral philosophers and bioethicists look not to biology but to cultural norms to try to assess the humanness of a five-day-old IVF embryo composed of some two hundred cells. As mentioned before, such fertilized embryos are routinely discarded. These discarded blastocysts, the philosophers argue, are not mourned or afforded a funeral. Absent such rituals, they should be considered less than truly human. To my mind, these are weaker arguments for the right conclusion. Such cultural inferences are too relative to decide the case. Vivisection, for example, was banned for centuries as a desecration of the body. And slavery was condoned with biblical references.

IV.

ON OCTOBER 8, IN *THE WASHINGTON POST*, Leon R. Kass, the chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, published an illuminating article called "Playing Politics with the Sick." He bemoaned recent statements by John Kerry that he described as seeking "electoral advantages by cruelly exploiting the hopes of patients and their families." Politics, Kass asserted, has no place in a considered and sober discussion of Bush's policy on stem-cell research. The Democratic candidate, he wrote, "ignores the weighty moral issues involved." Kass concluded his article with a plea: "Now is the time for the demagoguery to stop."

Kass is a physician and a philosopher and a man of profound conviction. But anyone who lives and works within the Beltway should recognize that no decision comes out of the Oval Office, whether it be occupied by a Republican or Democrat, without being attended by considerations of politics. The notion that Bush's policy was pure philosophy, and utterly innocent of politics, would be news to Karl Rove. Embryonic-stem-cell research is bitterly opposed by much of the Republican base. Although several opinion polls show that the large majority of Americans support stem-cell research, the Bush policy of denying federal support for creating new stem-cell lines and upholding the Dickey amendment reflects the president's personal religious beliefs as well as the religious beliefs of his core constituency.

Kass argues that the Bush policy is a Solomonic compromise:

> Wise public policy concerning embryonic stem-cell research must attend to three important—sometimes competing—responsibilities: to seek scientific knowledge and cures for terrible diseases, to protect human life in all its vulnerable stages, and to respect the diverse yet deeply held moral views of the American people. The president's policy on funding this

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research offers a prudent means of doing all three. It provides an effective way to vigorously promote embryonic stem cell research and seek cures for disease without violating respect for nascent human life, and without conferring the nation's official blessing, through the awarding of federal taxpayer dollars, on practices many Americans find morally reprehensible.

In fact, the policy falls short on all accounts, scientific and moral. It fails to "vigorously promote embryonic stem cell research," to put it mildly. Stem-cell lines available through federal programs tightly constrict the scope of scientific research and its potential therapeutic applications. Kass argues that expansion of this scope should be done without the use of taxpayers' money. But it is federal money that has brought America a level of science unparalleled in the world. No other country has made more contributions to the health and the welfare of humankind than the United States. This American glory is owed to the structure and the support of the NIH and other federal funding agencies.

Kass refers to efforts at universities such as Harvard, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins to set up stem-cell institutes with donations from wealthy individuals and foundations; but such initiatives are born of desperation rather than desire. They are a throwback to the days when scientists sought wealthy patrons to underwrite their efforts. Although philanthropy is often a powerful catalyst to initiate scientific projects, in almost every case it has been taxpayer money that has brought such work to fruition. Should creative and energetic scientists who could make important contributions to stem-cell research be frustrated or penalized if they are unable to secure a rich patron? Will patients with juvenile diabetes or Parkinson's disease or ALS have to be uprooted from their communities to enter into clinical trials using embryonic stem cells created after August 2001 that are available only in Baltimore or Boston? Some of the most innovative clinical trials in the country occur at the NIH itself, at the Warren Magnuson Center in Bethesda, and this institution is now cut off from possibly using cellular products derived from human embryonic cell lines not extant before August 2001. Similarly, the entire Veterans Administration hospital system would be denied access to such future therapies under the Bush policy, because taxpayer money supports the care and the treatment of our soldiers and veterans. Should this most heralded segment of our society, the people responsible for the defense of America, be barred from such medicine?

Kass's distinction between private research and public research also has the unwitting effect of damaging his moral argument, because such a distinction cannot be about morality. If embryonic-stem-cell research is wrong in a federally funded laboratory, then it is wrong also in a privately funded laboratory. If it is the slippery slope to evil in Bethesda, then it is also the slippery slope to evil in Cambridge or Palo Alto or Baltimore.

KASS AFFIRMS THAT WE SHOULD all "respect the diverse ... deeply held moral views of the American people." I emphatically agree, but respect does not necessarily translate into law. We respectfully legislate against deeply held moral views all the time. There are pacifists who passionately believe that weapons designed to kill people are immoral. There are many secular and religious leaders who passionately believe that capital punishment for any crime is immoral. Yet there is ample federal legislation that funds numerous types of weapons for killing, and taxpayer money is used in the execution of criminals convicted for federal crimes. The nation routinely confers its "official blessing," through the awarding of federal taxpayer dollars, on practices that many Americans find morally reprehensible. This may be insensitive, but it is the democratic way.

Kass states that taking stem cells from five- to six-day-old human embryos, generally developed during IVF, "is not a morally neutral act. Just as no society can afford to be callous to the needs of suffering humanity, none can afford to be cavalier about how it treats nascent human life." Again, I agree. No one should be cavalier in considering these issues. But why is Kass so sure that the advocates of embryonic-stem-cell research are being morally or philosophically cavalier? Surely there is a significant difference between nascent human life and independent human life. And Kass would not take kindly to the suggestion (which would be unfair, since he is a thoughtful man) that he is being cavalier with independent human life. Anyway, when Kass states that the president's policy of upholding the Dickey amendment "promotes health without violating life or the law of the land," we must note the slight emendation in his language, the disappearance of those rigorous modifying terms "nascent" or "potential." "Violating life" is the phrase that clearly echoes the religious beliefs at the core of the Bush policy and the core of his political base.

THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES OF progress in science. One cannot say with certainty when, or even if, a breakthrough will occur. What is certain is that failure is much more frequent than success. Indeed, failure is often essential to eventual success. In science, we learn most from our misconceptions and our mistakes. And sometimes the most important advances come from the most unexpected places: discoveries made in a worm or in yeast have been key to our understanding of the biology of several human cancers.

The hubris of scientists has no place in arguing for research in human embryonic stem cells. Overselling therapeutic applications is a disservice to desperate patients; and avoiding the ineffable question of what is life is willful ignorance. Scientists who engage in embryonic-stem-cell research have certainly made a moral choice—but it is a supremely defensible moral choice, believing as they do that a greater good will be served by healing the living by means of risking the sacrifice of what may, or may not, be an unborn human soul.

The facts are before us. Human embryonic stem cells provide the potential to ameliorate great human suffering and to save lives. We cannot say when that potential will be realized, only that its realization is much less likely under President Bush's policy. For stem cells are the veritable life of the flesh. Whether or not the prayers of the sick and the dying will be answered through Scripture, they may certainly be addressed by medicine, and legislation, and the judicial process, and the ballot box. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Quote Unquote

YOU CAN LEARN A GREAT deal from a newspaper, Baudelaire remarked, if you read it with the proper contempt. Joan Didion seems to think that this is all a writer about politics needs to know. Her political criticism is just press criticism of an exceedingly portentous kind, based upon her tranquil conviction that we are all, except for epistemologically fortunate and mentally unmanipulable individuals such as herself, helplessly, or worse, conspiratorially, in the grip of the media. She does not argue against people or positions, she merely quotes them and invites her readers to join her in the tickle of alienation, the esotericist excitement, that her quotation marks provide. There are two problems with such a method, and they are nicely illustrated by her retort, in the course of a long complaint about American politics in *The New York Review of Books* of October 21, to an article that I published in THE NEW REPUBLIC ("What Remains," June 28).

THE FIRST PROBLEM WITH DIDION'S method is this: If you are going to quote something devastatingly, you must quote it correctly. Didion helps herself to half a sentence of mine to demonstrate that I was seeking "cover" for my support for the war in Iraq. She says I wrote that "I am not embarrassed by my assumption that Saddam Hussein possessed the sort of arsenal that made him a clear and present danger." I wrote that "I am not embarrassed by my assumption that Saddam Hussein possessed the sort of arsenal that made him a clear and present danger: The alarming intelligence estimates were shared by many Western governments, so that the debates in the months preceding the war concerned the methods for disarming Iraq, not the reasons for disarming it." See? I was being regretful about the state of my knowledge, not boastful about the state of my patriotism. I was not accepting the administration's insistence that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, I was rejecting it. I was not defending myself, I was attacking myself. The sentence was written in amplification, not in extenuation, of the opening words of my little essay: "If I had known that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, I would not have supported this war." I imagined that this was clear. But here is the dean of the Jerry Brown left, in the midst of propounding again her mischievous quadrennial lesson that there is no stirring difference between the Democrat and the Republican, since neither is appalled by American power or American capitalism—here she is brilliantly unmasking the pseudo-clarity of a *valet du pouvoir*. I feel so found out.

THE SECOND PROBLEM WITH DIDION'S method is that you do not refute a proposition by putting inverted commas around it. Did Didion know that Saddam Hussein had no chemical or biological weapons? She does not say. Did she believe that Saddam Hussein posed no danger? She does not say. Did she think that the policy of containment was working? She does not say. Did she disagree that Saddam Hussein's history in the matter of weapons of mass destruction, his genocidal use of them, his defiance of U.N. inspectors and resolutions concerning them, had any bearing upon the decision to use force against him? She does not say. Did she recognize, in her worldliness, that the aluminum tubes that Colin Powell described to the Security Council on February 5, 2003, could not serve as rotors in a uranium centrifuge? She does not say. About the war in Iraq she does not say very much at all. Her disagreement is oddly without substance. She is grave, but she is not serious.

FROM THE SAME ALTITUDE, DIDION quotes my observation that I can "imagine no grander historical experiment in our time than the effort to bring a liberal order to an Arab society," without explaining what precisely are her philosophical and historical and strategic objections to such an assertion. Does she believe that a liberal order is impossible in Arab society, or in Muslim society, or in Iraqi society? She does not say. Does she think that the benefits of liberalization for the Arab world do not justify the costs of the endeavor? She does not say. Does she deny that the establishment of free institutions in the Arab world will have a salutary effect upon American security? She does not say. Does she prefer Huntington, or maybe Burke, to Jefferson? She does not say. These are plainly not the kinds of questions that perplex her. She cares more about the easy subjects of punditry than about the hard subjects of policy. This leads to a certain hastiness of understanding. Thus she comments that when I wrote my piece the historical experiment was in my view "over," but everything that I have written about the liberalization of Iraq suggests the opposite—that democratization, which I take to be an indispensable goal of American foreign policy, is an objective that, except in rare instances, cannot be accomplished in the short term, because it is a policy of destabilization, in which an entire political culture must be deposed; and that the Bush government failed grievously to comprehend the nature of democratization, and its difficulty, because it was enthralled by certain dogmas and definitions.

THE EFFECT OF DIDION'S QUOTATION marks, of those radicalizing little hooks of hers, is to deny that the debate in which she is taking part is a debate between principles. For the principles in the debate are all on one side, her side. She is the servant of principles, and those who take the other view are the servants of interests, whether they know it or not. Their ideas do not have to be disproved, they have to be exposed. They are wrong because they are corrupt. When Didion incorruptibly adorns my admission that "I was deceived" with her quotation marks and again leaves it at that, her implication is that she was herself not deceived. I think I know why not. People who believe that George W. Bush is generally wrong are going to be right a lot of the time. But this sort of axiomatic suspicion is not to be mistaken for critical reflection. It is just as doctrinaire, and as innocent of the empirical impulse, and as useless for the search for concrete solutions to actual problems, as the credulity of people who believe that George W. Bush is generally right. The Bush administration has done bad things well and good things poorly, and it does not deserve to be returned to office; but the American alarm about threats and tyrannies is not all, or mainly, war fever. Didion's knowingness about things that she could not have known is obnoxious, even if it is not as obnoxious as the knowingness of those in Washington who could have known.

LEON WIESELTIER

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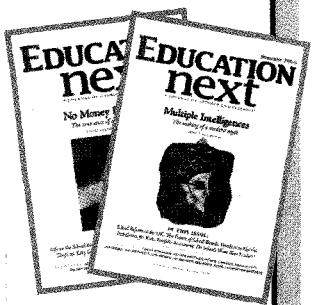

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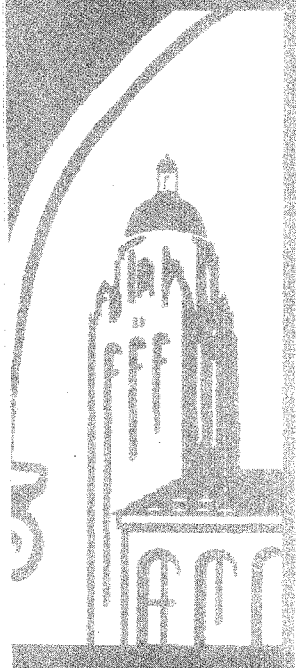

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No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is best known as a landmark—and controversial—effort by the federal government to hold public schools accountable for their performance by means of standards and tests. It is also a landmark in another, less publicized sense: it requires that all academic courses in every public school be taught by "highly qualified" teachers. This teacher requirement is unprecedented, and it has great promise.

There is a fly in the ointment, however—a problem in the way NCLB is currently written and executed that undermines its own efforts to improve teacher quality. This is a problem that our political leaders are ignoring. They shouldn't be.

On the surface, NCLB's approach makes sense. It mandates that to be highly qualified a teacher must not only have a bachelor's degree and be certified, which the states already require, but also demonstrate competence in the subject being taught. This is the great innovation of the act—it requires competence.

For new teachers, competence can be demonstrated by having a college major in the relevant subject or by taking a rigorous test of knowledge. Veteran teachers can demonstrate competence in these same ways. Or they can do it by meeting a "high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation" (HOUSSE), which the states are allowed to devise on their own.

Herein lies the problem. **The HOUSSE provisions create a loophole big enough to drive three million veteran teachers through—and the states have incentives to do just that.** They are under intense political pressure, especially from teachers unions, to protect the interests of veteran teachers and to ensure that no one loses a job. It is no accident that bad teachers have long been virtually impossible to remove from the classroom. And it is no accident that most states are now designing their HOUSSE standards to ensure that every veteran teacher can meet them, regardless of their true competence.

How do the states pull off this charade? By stipulating that their veteran teachers are not required to take substantive tests or have the relevant college majors, but can instead gain highly qualified status through some combination of teaching experience, classes in professional development, self-compiled portfolios, supervisor evaluations, and other factors that can easily produce positive outcomes for every teacher.

In Arkansas, for example, teachers with five years' experience automatically satisfy the HOUSSE standard and become "highly qualified." In Ohio and Massachusetts, teachers can meet the standard by simply racking up enough hours in professional development courses. In New Hampshire, teachers can do it by engaging in a "self-assessment" with a supervisor and "partner." And so it goes, for virtually every state—making a mockery of the law and ensuring that incompetent and mediocre teachers will not be weeded out.

This is a national travesty. The solution is for Congress to modify NCLB by eliminating the HOUSSE option, and requiring that all veteran teachers either have a college major in their subject area or pass a rigorous test of substantive competence. **The purpose of our public school system is to see that our children are receiving a quality education, not to protect the jobs of the adults who are hired to teach them.** Especially if they can't demonstrate that they are knowledgeable enough to do so.

—Terry M. Moe

Terry M. Moe is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of the Institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education, and a professor of political science at Stanford University.

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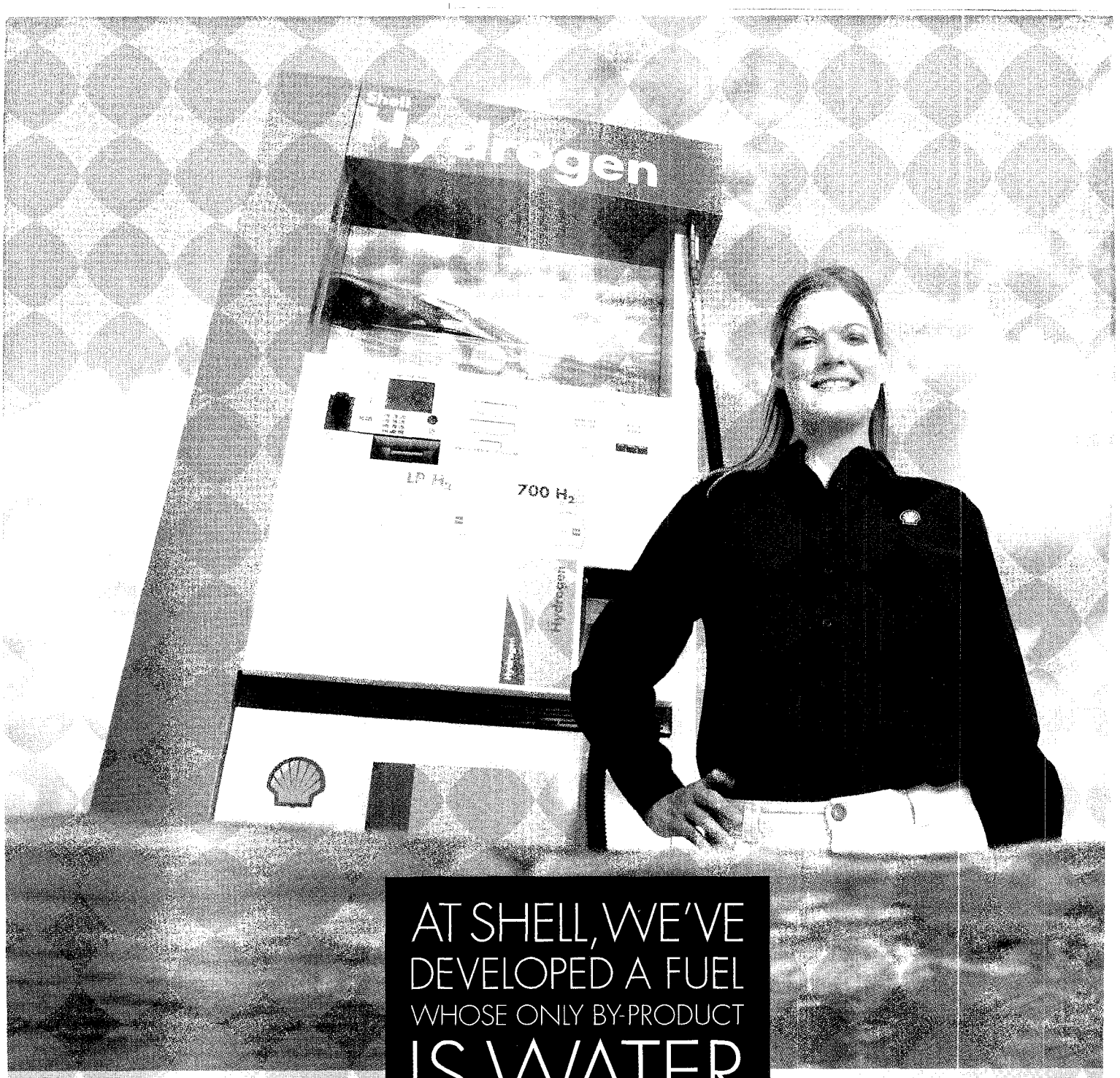

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